

UNtITLEd, OR



WHAT TO DO WHEN EVERYONE GETS ARRESTED.



A CRASS COURSE IN



PROVIDING ARRESTEE SUPPORT

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introduction: welcome to u r zine

To loosely steal the opening lines of the zine Colosnap Legal Collective put out just prior to the RNC (nearly all copies of which were, ironically, ~~printed~~ promptly seized by law enforcement): Hello friends, comrades, cops, and double agents!

We'd like to warmly welcome you back, even if only in the form of the written word, to Minnesota, home of 10,000 nefarious conspiracies (allegedly).

We "are" CRASS (Community RNC Arrestee Support Structure). We say that with a bit of a wink and a nod since the bulk of this writing has been done of necessity, by a handful of individuals. There's something more than a bit ridiculous about claiming to speak for the literally dozens of amazing folks who have comprised a non-~~hierarchical~~ hierarchical, autonomous organization.

Techically, we are the CRASS Zine Project Working Group, but mail can be directed to us, (day of gloomy prouze to our comrades. We've been working fine this short, however, to achieving the greatest possible levels of consensus and collaboration with anyone still involved in CRASS and those can reach with drafts of this thing. This, being, it ultimately reflects more than the narrow perspectives of the working group members.

The idea for this zine came about way back in the early days of CRASS, and it was born out of a desire not to reflect our effects and those our comrades ~~in~~ and failings with the movement at large and to help strengthen it. ↗

This zine is intended as both a critical examination for ourselves and other interested parties (no, not you, officer, but feel free to put this one down now) and as a how-to guide for communities gearing up for a large mobilization in their neck of the woods. There are things we did really well, about which most of us remain proud and that we tend to think you could benefit from replicating. There are things we did poorly, and we hope you don't fuck up in the same ways. There are things we wish we'd done, or thought of, or did better, and maybe they can be implemented down the road by someone more prepared... someone like you.



Finally, a shout out to everyone involved in any way with the struggles against state repression that marred the Twin Cities in September of 2008 (and here (longer) afterwards). Thank you for your dedication, inspiration, and willingness to fight back. You are all so beautiful!

The representatives of state power who call themselves "Republicans," along with their hired guns and henchmen and corporate sponsors, thought they could hold their self-congratulatory, taxpayer-funded party in our cities without incident. They were wrong. They thought they could divide activist communities as they have done so many times before. They were wrong about that too.

And they thought they could shear off everyone in court, forcing everyone into plea agreements or winning convictions at trial without the slightest evidence and without just cause. While they successfully pressured people into taking pleas and got some convictions, our solidarity and resistance put pressure on them and ensured they had a force to reckon with, even if we weren't able to defeat them entirely (but who really thought it would be that easy?)

We suffered some losses and lost some battles, for sure. And not all the battles are over, even at the time of this writing (more than a year and a half after the RNC). But we have all gained so much more than we've lost since the RNC. We've provided each other with much-needed political and emotional support. We've faced our enemies in the courts and in the streets. That's solidarity. And we've taken care of those who needed help returning to town to fight their charges and resist state repression. That's mutual aid.

THESE ARE THINGS THE STATE CANNOT UNDERSTAND, AND THIS CANNOT DESTROY. THESE ARE THINGS THAT STRENGTHEN US AND OUR COMMUNITIES, HELPING US

TO BE STRONGER FOR THE NEXT TIME WE COME FACE TO FACE WITH OUR OPPRESSORS.

SOLIDARITY FOR FUCKING EVER. THANKS FOR READING OUR ZINE.

xoxo,

THE CRASS Zine Working Group

some background on the 2008 RNC

The Republican National Convention (RNC) took place in St. Paul, Minnesota, between September 1st and 4th, 2008. Protests against it occurred in both St. Paul and Minneapolis. While thousands of people flooded the streets to express their dissent, police used \$50M in taxpayer funds to employ 3,500 police officers imported from around the nation, 200 new tasers, almost \$2M in pepper spray alone, along with other chemical weapons, numerous new surveillance cameras all over St. Paul, and who the hell knows what else.

With the RNC in the process of being forcibly evicted from community memory, it's worth noting that these weapons, "less-lethal" munitions, and cameras are very much still with us. Like most tactics of police violence, they are being used against the most vulnerable among us, particularly against poor people and people of color.

Despite St. Paul mayor Chris Coleman's outlandish characterization of the nonviolent demonstrations throughout the Twin Cities as "one of the most coordinated, orchestrated efforts in the history of this country to try to create chaos in a community and to shut down political dialogue," the overwhelming majority of violence was carried out by police officers. The state's kindly soldiers gassed, pepper-sprayed, beat, and fired rubber bullets and other projectiles at nonviolent crowds,

ultimately arresting over 800 people.

Repressive police conduct before, during, and after the RNC was simply another in a long line of attempts to silence public dissent and quash political organizing. The Friday night before the RNC, the cops raided the RNC Welcoming Committee's convergence space and detained dozens of people, confiscating personal belongings, computers, and literature. Early the next morning, cops raided several houses in Minneapolis with assault rifles drawn, arresting some of the perceived organizers (who are now known as the RNC 8). Still more perceived organizers were arrested in targeted grabs before the convention even convened. Court struggles are ongoing at the time of this writing.

Local police agencies and the FBI used informants and infiltrators to spy on activist groups, including both mainstream liberal and more radical organizations. These double agents were also used as agent provocateurs, creating conditions in which people could be charged for crimes orchestrated by the state. One informant, Brandon Darby, was successfully able to persuade two young organizers from Texas to create Molotov cocktails, putting them in a position where they had little choice but to later plead guilty to felonies in court.

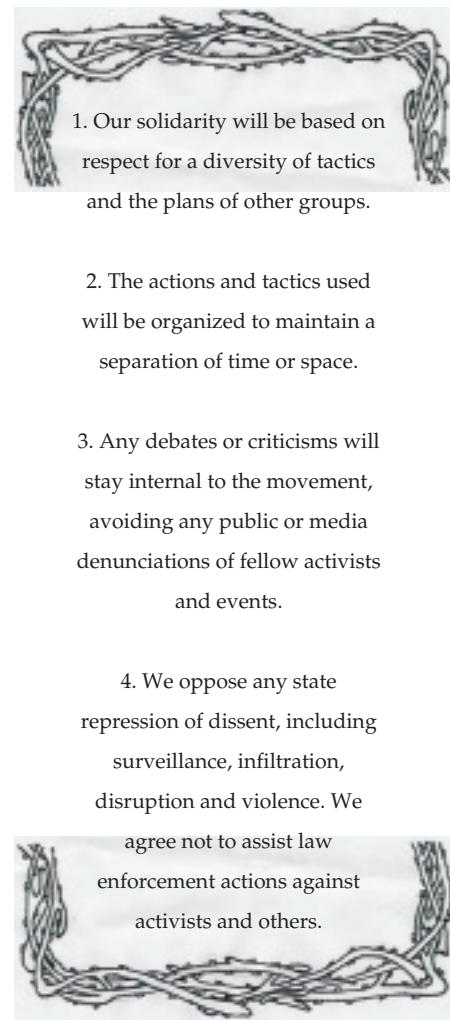
The uses of mass arrest techniques and the overt targeting of journalists, medics, and legal support folk were also meant to send a

clear message. The state aimed to demonstrate that voices expressing opposition of any but the most banal sort were not welcome, even though this nation and our “liberal” Midwestern cities routinely extolled “free speech” as a cherished virtue. We were meant to understand that those who would cover the events, treat the injured, or support basic rights had as much to fear as anyone else on the streets.

Nevertheless, many groups and individuals remained steadfastly unwilling to allow these abuses to stand without a fight, and some, anticipating the tumult, started organizing to counter and disrupt the convention as early as two years prior. Many tactics and organizational models were used; many people, aware of the state’s past successes in creating and exploiting divisions within activist communities, sought to unite sometimes disparate groups with differing interests to resist state repression more generally.

In practice, these guidelines became known as the St. Paul Principles, and the broad acceptance they received from organizing bodies is notable.

It should be noted that not all activists felt that these guidelines were fully adhered to by all groups or individuals in all circumstances. For instance, the rabid demonization of “anarchists” by law enforcement arguably worked its way into the rhetoric of some who



opposed the RNC but who did not identify as anarchists. Still and all, the consensus that the St. Paul Principles should be something to strive for in coalition organizing was considered a watershed moment by many.

On other fronts, a range of legal support efforts was already underway months before the RNC. Folks from Coldsnap Legal Collective trained people to know their rights.

Coldsnap set up the legal support office, trained volunteers to work in it, and coordinated a team of people who would be in the streets in order to keep the office updated on the cops’ actions. Several people from Midnight Special Law Collective came into town to help with both trainings and the office. They also brought their expertise in creating and maintaining a database for information on the arrestees, running a jail vigil to support people as they left jail and identify who was being released, and facilitating arrestee meetings after the convention. Folks from the National Lawyers Guild worked on training tons of legal observers, creating a list of lawyers who could help with criminal defense needs, providing an office space for the legal support work, and creating a system for collecting and cataloging evidence.

Through a combination of all these efforts, we created an infrastructure that was sufficient for staying informed of developments on the street, learning who had been arrested and what they were charged with, greeting them with hugs and warm food when they were released, and communicating with them to help them better understand the criminal injustice system.

rnc aftermath and crass

In the wake of violent state repression and hundreds of arrests, many arrestees and their allies came together to figure out how to collectively fight the charges and hold the

state accountable. Groups initially involved in organizing this collaborative legal support saw a clear need for it to continue after the action. Further, many hoped it would involve a broad, decentralized spectrum of those affected by state repression, rather than a narrow or particularly vocal subsection of the activist community. There was general agreement, at least among arrestees and radical legal workers, that arrestees should organize these efforts rather than placing responsibility for them solely in the hands of professionals or other elites.

After the convention, the groups mentioned above and others took the first steps toward creating an ongoing support structure by facilitating arrestee meetings. These meetings were designed to share information, provide an opportunity for people to connect with each other, and create collective bargaining demands.

Through these meetings, CRASS developed: the Community RNC Arrestee Support Structure, an arrestee-led organization dedicated to providing the support folks needed to fight their charges—regardless of the charges’ severity, regardless of whether the arrestees were local, regardless of whether they could afford attorneys, and regardless of whether they plead guilty or fought their charges. By standing in solidarity with one another, we felt we would be in the best position to use the strength of our numbers to pressure the system into dropping the

charges, or at least to help protect the most vulnerable among us. Over time, we developed both a court solidarity strategy and a number of working groups to help organize our efforts (topics discussed in more detail throughout this zine).

CRASS was a coalition of folks, some involved with formal organizations and some with no previous affiliation at all. But arrestees formed the core membership of the group and were most actively involved. In addition to unaffiliated folks facing unjust charges at the hands of the state and various members of groups already noted, many people who helped form CRASS came from organizations such as the Anti-War Committee, the Coalition to March on the RNC and Stop the War (a coordinating structure for many different groups, both local and national),

Communities United Against Police Brutality (the local copwatch group), North Star Health Collective (which coordinated street medics and the Wellness Center during the RNC), the RNC Welcoming Committee (the local anarchist/anti-authoritarian organizing body that coordinated logistics such as housing and the Convergence Space), and Twin Cities Indymedia.

CRASS ended up operating as an



autonomous group consisting of both semi-autonomous working groups and a spokescouncil. As such, we worked closely with other organizations and individuals while attempting not to detract from their post-RNC organizing efforts or from new projects.

It's our hope that a strain of honest self-criticism will inform this zine, but we also

want to make clear that the structures we ultimately created helped provide a lot of support to people facing charges from the RNC. At the time of this writing, the vast majority of the misdemeanor charges have been dropped or declined for prosecution, and only a few dozen people have accepted plea agreements.

Although more than 100 people were arrested on felony charges, fewer than two dozen were prosecuted and many of those charges have been dropped.

Unfortunately, several people were pressured into accepting plea agreements for felony charges at both the state and federal level through a number of malicious (but typical) actions by prosecutors and judges. These included piling on charges to scare people into taking plea agreements, a tactic that the courts routinely rely on, whether they're going after mostly privileged activists or in

their customary repression of poor people, communities of color, etc. Many people were pressured into plea agreements for petty misdemeanor and misdemeanor charges, a group of people were found guilty at trial for misdemeanor charges and sentenced to community service, and another person was found guilty of a felony at trial and sentenced to 120 days in jail.

The prosecutors weren't able to have their way entirely, however. When the first seven cases were brought to trial, a judge threw them out before the prosecution could even present the cases because the state had no legal standing at all. Other people successfully fought their charges and were acquitted at trial. The state got only one early conviction in open court for a misdemeanor, resulting in a \$50 fine, and even that was granted an appeal and effectively overturned.

CRASS combated elected officials related to the RNC at almost every juncture. We did our best to shame the Ramsey County Sheriff, the Mayors of both Minneapolis and St. Paul, and the St. Paul City Prosecutor (who was once overheard outside the Ramsey County Courthouse lamenting media coverage of CRASS antics as a "black eye" for his department).



CRASS also joined forces with the RNC 8 Defense Committee on many occasions to wage a pressure campaign against Ramsey County Attorney Susan Gaertner. The RNC 8 are eight anarchist organizers from Minneapolis who were arrested prior to the convention, mostly through early morning house raids. They were originally charged with "conspiracy to riot in the 2nd degree" (wait for it) "in furtherance of terrorism." Later, Gaertner added "conspiracy to commit criminal damage to property in the 1st degree" (wait for it) "in furtherance of terrorism," "conspiracy to riot in the 2nd degree" with no awesome terrorism enhancement, and

"conspiracy to commit criminal damage to property in the 1st degree," also terrorism enhancement free.

The charges with terrorism enhancements were the first uses of Minnesota's "PATRIOT Act." Despite Gaertner's disingenuous claims to the contrary, the pressure campaign, spearheaded by the RNC 8 Defense Committee and consisting largely of demonstrations and interruptions at her gubernatorial campaign events, contributed to them being dropped entirely. Nevertheless, the RNC 8 are still awaiting trial for the remaining charges at the time of this writing.

The next two sections of our zine talk about what legal support folks did well before CRASS formed. Much of it includes descriptions, analyses, and advice from several members of Coldsnap who were also active in CRASS. These individuals' opinions are offered at face value in the hopes that they might be useful to provide some context and backstory. Their opinions are also very much their own. They're

SECTION 2

A brief-ish overview of legal support organizing leading up to the RNC

not any person's or organization's "official positions" and shouldn't be taken as such. We've included this section because of the importance of having a legal support structure prior to the mass arrest situation for helping an organization like CRASS form. CRASS didn't come out of a vacuum; here's some of what was going on that helped make us possible.

Know Your Rights Trainings

As the RNC was approaching, there was quite a bit of legal support organizing to help prepare people to deal with interactions with the police. Both Coldsnap Legal Collective and the

National Lawyers Guild--Minnesota started working together to prepare a legal support structure in the beginning of 2008, although in different ways and with different areas of focus. Some of this work included Know Your Rights trainings, Legal Observer trainings, and an organizing meeting for groups providing logistical support during the convention.

Coldsnap conducted a series of Know Your Rights (KYR) trainings in the months leading up to the convention. Many of these happened prior to

Critical Mass bike rides, which are on the last Friday of every month in Minneapolis. Back in August 2007, the RNC Welcoming Committee hosted a pre-convention organizing meeting that drew people from around the nation. The local organizers invited the participants to join in on the bike ride. Cops from both Minneapolis and St. Paul joined in as well. Although the police presence at Critical Mass rides in Minneapolis tends to be somewhat heavy and always more than even sympathetic interpretations of the need to ensure "public safety" would warrant, the presence at this particular ride was clearly designed, at least in part, to intimidate and harass activists who were organizing resistance to the RNC. Not long after the ride was underway, the police attacked. In what

has been described as a police riot, cops tackled riders, pushed others off their bikes, and arrested 19 people. Later on, some people took plea deals, others had their charges dropped, and some went to trial. One person who went to trial was acquitted and later sued the city, winning a substantial settlement.

Knowing this history and recognizing the strategic significance of the police "practicing" for the RNC, Coldsnap did a series of KYR trainings prior to the rides in case the cops tried to attack people again. In addition to educating people about their rights, these trainings helped show the cops that the community was organizing and would not passively accept the repression they wanted to dole out. Several times, the cops stood behind the facilitators during most of the training, in a clear attempt to intimidate them and everyone else present.

Coldsnap also facilitated a series of KYRs throughout August 2008 in conjunction with their volunteer trainings for people interested in working in the office. All the trainings were based on the role-play scenarios developed by Midnight Special Law Collective through their experiences in decentralizing this knowledge since they formed back in the days of the WTO in Seattle. Through this collective

knowledge, shared within the community in response to state repression, Coldsnap was able to help educate people in the local community about...

Your Rights!

Being questioned by a cop? You don't have to answer any questions and can leave at any time. Ask, "Am I being detained?" If the answer is no, leave. If the answer is yes...

Being detained? You have the rights to remain silent and to speak to a lawyer. Say, "I am going to remain silent. I want to speak to a lawyer." The cops can try to cajole you into answering their questions and can pat you down to make sure you don't have any weapons, but they can't force you to answer any questions or search your bags or car. If they try, say, "I do not consent to a search."

Under arrest? You have the rights to remain silent and to speak to a lawyer. Say, "I am going to remain silent. I want to speak to a lawyer." The cops can search you and maybe your car (depending on the situation), but it can be helpful to continue saying, "I do not consent to a search," in case the arrest is illegal (which can occasionally be used to have your charges dismissed in court).

Cops at your house? They must show you a warrant that lists your address,

time the cops can search your house (e.g., day or night), and the items the cops should be looking for. The warrant needs to be signed by a judge. Read the warrant before you let them into the house and refuse to let them in if they do not have a warrant. Even if they have a valid warrant, say, "I do not consent to a

In addition to facilitating Know Your Rights Trainings, Coldsnap organized a street team, essentially a group of people who could report police movements and actions to the office to keep the legal support team up-to-date on what was happening throughout the convention.



search," but do not physically resist them, in case they go outside the bounds of the warrant. Protecting your rights in this way may increase your chances of mounting a successful legal defense in court later on.

Organizing the Coldsnap Street Team and Working with NLG Legal Observers

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The street team consisted of folks who were going to be in the streets for whatever reason and wanted to send the legal support team accurate information so they didn't have to rely on the state and corporate media to find out what was happening.

Street teamers performed several functions in addition to keeping in communication with the legal support office. They helped pass out the jail

support hotline number to people, encouraging them to write it on their bodies in permanent marker since all their possessions would be taken from them in jail, when they would need the number the most. Similarly, many of them did on-the-fly mini-KYR trainings to help people know how to protect their rights when they had to interact with the cops (some of these happened while people were being processed and in the holding facility at the jail). They also did a lot of copwatching, taking notes, photos, and video of the cops, including the jurisdictions they hailed from, their actions, their weapons, and the way they cordoned people off and brutalized them en masse. Street teamers looked like just about anyone else out in the streets, with the exception of a yellow arm band if they chose to wear one, and were free to make their own decisions about where they would go and what they would do out in the streets.

In many ways, the street teamers shared many responsibilities and functions with the National Lawyers Guild Legal Observers (LOs). However, the LOs had the explicit focus of documenting police activities to protect people's rights in court after they were arrested and charged. As such, they took detailed notes, photos, and videos, all of which were organized as evidence under the direction of attorneys. Their evidence

later proved useful in helping lawyers prepare their defenses, and their presence in the streets often had a significant effect on the cops because they knew they were being watched by people who knew their rights and what to do about violations. While this privileged status doesn't stop the police from assaulting and arresting LOs, they can play an important role in the streets. They typically take pains to dress in nice clothing, wear bright green hats that designate them as Legal Observers, stay to the side of actions taking place, and record as many details as possible about situations (which often entails talking directly to cops in pleasant tones).

While there was not a tremendous amount of coordination between street teamers and LOs, the functions these two separate groups performed were useful, both in the streets and with supporting folks after the pepper spray had cleared the air and the musty smell of court rooms took over.

Setting Up the Legal Support Office

Coldsnap also worked long and hard, in conjunction with the National Lawyers Guild—Minnesota and Midnight Special, to set up an office for legal support operations during the RNC. The

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legal support office is the place where legal workers answer phone calls from the jail support hotline, track arrestees in the system, coordinate with lawyers and other support people, and communicate with the legal workers in the street and at the jail vigil. The safest place to have the office is in a lawyer's office: lawyers have more protections against raids in some ways and, in the event of a raid, the lawyers involved in legal support efforts can argue that data in the office should be privileged (e.g., they could ask the judge to forbid the cops from looking at it and force them to give it back). It's a good idea to establish relationships with lawyers, particularly those in the National Lawyers Guild, well in advance to work out the logistics.

In addition to arranging for the space, you should plan on what to do in it before, during, and after the main days of action. In general, it's a good idea to have the jail support hotline running a couple weeks before and after the event, even if all it does is go right to voicemail. Running legal support offices is an expensive undertaking, so fundraising well in advance is a good idea too.

Setting up and running a legal support office is an incredibly complicated undertaking. You won't regret putting a lot of time and energy into planning for

it. Ideally, this organizing would start at the same time as the organizing for protests, convergence spaces, food, etc. We've broken down the things Coldsnap did to organize the legal support office to help you figure out the kinds of things you should consider and plan for to support people in your community. Check them out below.

HEY! Before you dive into all the logistical details, don't forget to plan ways to take care of yourself and your comrades while you're in the office. When things get crazy, make sure to take a moment to breathe when you need to collect yourself. Be kind to yourself, to others in the office, and to the people on the other side of the phone line. Don't be afraid to ask for help and support when you need it. Also sleep as much as you can when you're not in the office and remember to eat. Self-care is critical.

You'll want the office to be an efficient, comfortable place for people to work in for long hours and under a lot of stress. To make this happen, you'll need to figure out how to cram everything you need into whatever space you have available to work in. Try to check out the space at least a month before the action starts so you can figure out how to arrange things. Some of the things to consider include:

Furniture, office supplies, and such: You'll need lots of stuff in order to create a good work space. Once you figure out how much space you'll have available, decide how many desks or tables you'll want to hold all the computers, phones, filing system equipment, etc. You'll also need enough chairs for the people working in the office; a couch is cool too, to give people someplace to kick back when they have a moment. Filing cabinets or some sort of filing system (trays, hanging file folders in crates, etc.) are indispensable. You'll also need lots of office supplies, including big-ass note pads or a role of butcher paper, lots of tape (scotch, masking, etc.), markers, pens, legal size note pads, paper clips, binder clips, staplers, paper, at least one printer, etc. And don't forget about food and beverages! Make sure you have cups, plates, silverware, a coffeemaker, plenty of coffee and tea, bread, peanut butter, chips, cookies, fruit, and whatever other tasty edible things you can scrounge up.

If the space you'll be working from doesn't have the furniture you need, you can find a lot of it for free online (check out your area's Craigslist page) as long as you're willing to pick it up. You can also put out a call for donations of furniture, office supplies, and food. You may be surprised how easy it is to get

everything you need for free or for really cheap. Coldsnap was able to get just about everything donated and it didn't take too long to round everything up.

Arrestee database: Tracking people from arrest to release is the most important part of jail support. To do this, you will need a bad-ass intake form (check out the one Coldsnap used in the Appendix) and either a filing system or database (or both) to record info about the people who were arrested. Coldsnap used a custom database for tracking information and collecting data on individuals and events (e.g., mass arrests), since OpenOffice spreadsheets and other things like that weren't sophisticated enough to serve legal support purposes. The database was based on software from Sugar CRM, a commercial open source database service. Although Sugar provides services for a wide range of horrible corporations, it offers a sophisticated database. There are other options out there, of course, so spending time researching them well before the database is needed is a very good idea. The database was also hosted on a private server, and the database URL and login information were only given out on a need-to-know basis—and never electronically or verbally!

The arrestee intake form and database

should allow legal workers to collect a lot of information about arrestees to help track them in the system. This info could include the following: full legal name (or alias, if the person isn't giving that info to the state); date of birth; contact info; arrest date, time, and location; charges, citation number, court docket number, and scheduled hearing date and time; medical and other needs; contact info for the arrestee's legal support person; and lawyer's name and contact info.

Having a combination of paper intake forms and a database is beneficial for a number of reasons. When the phones explode, having paper copies of intake forms to write on could be faster than typing. The paper copies can then be input into the database when the phones aren't ringing as much or there are more people in the office to help. Paper copies can also allow you to continue taking down info efficiently if the computers have problems. Of course, paper copies also create liabilities in case of a raid, so keep them tidy and within easy grabbing reach just in case.

It doesn't always work this way, but if you get an opportunity to build the database and train people on data entry beforehand, that's freaking awesome. The more uniform the data entry during intake, the easier to keep accurate records and find people in the database



every step of the way. After the RNC, CRASS used the database extensively to keep track of folks. Whether it was updating the database with info from court watch notes (new charges, cases dismissed, future court dates, etc.) or creating a list of arrestees to call to talk about the court solidarity strategy, the database was indispensable.

Phone stations: The phones are one of the most important parts of the office. It's best to stick to landlines rather than taking the risks involved with FiOS (Fiber Optic Shit) or cable phones, since people can often only call local landline phone numbers from jail. Also, FiOS

phones take up a lot of the bandwidth on your interwebs connection, which can slow down your interwebs speed. When you create your phone bank, it's generally a good idea to have a roll-over system that will allow you to have multiple phones available at all times, in addition to voicemail. The hotline number that people write on their bodies in permanent marker should be the main line, and no one should call in directly to the other lines for jail support. If possible, you might want to have one line dedicated to making outgoing calls (this should have long distance calling capabilities) or an anonymous, pre-paid cell phone so you don't tie up the hotline. Don't have an automated greeting, as people may not be able to get through to you from jail if you do, particularly if they're calling collect.

Phone systems such as this are really expensive, so expect to shell out hundreds and hundreds of dollars in phone bills. You'll also likely need to spend a lot of time talking with the phone company to make sure you have all the services scheduled to begin and end as needed. For example, you'll want to make sure the roll-over lines are live before the big events start happening, but since they're expensive, you might want to cancel all but the main hotline shortly after the convergence is over. It's also a good idea to set up an account

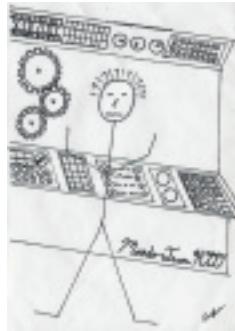
with the local jail so people can make collect calls to the hotline more easily, if the jail offers this service.

During the RNC, each of the phone stations included the phone, pens, a note pad, a computer, and intake forms. There was also a sheet with basic first aid info, such as advice on treating dehydration, as well as reactions to pepper spray, mace, and other chemical weapons. Working with your local medic collective to get accurate information is a good idea. And there was a quick phone guide to arrestee support so people could review the things they were supposed to do and not have to rely on their frazzled brains when a call came through. Having this resource is especially important for putting volunteers at ease as they take their first couple of phone calls. Jotting down notes in the note pad can be invaluable both during phone calls and for taking care of shit afterwards. Even if people are entering info straight into the database, it can be helpful to write the date and time of calls on their notepads along with basic info about who called and any important notes from the call.

Computers: Having computers in the legal support office is basically a necessity, but as is always true with computers, they can cause a ton of problems (logistical, legal). Coldsnap

used several old desktop computers for the legal support office. They were set up with Ubuntu because fuck proprietary software. They were generally pretty slow, bare bones machines, but they did what the office needed them to do. The login info for each was different and they were linked together in a network with a server as the hub (which was only used when every other computer was in use since it tended to slow down the network when its processing capacity was used for other purposes).

Coldsnap had a basic computer setup during the RNC, but it's possible to get much more techie about it. This is likely beneficial, since data recovered from computers seized during raids is all too often used against the movement. It's best to run Ubuntu or another Linux-based system and to set the computers up securely. You can encrypt the hard drives using an advanced encryption method (e.g., AES) so the data will be harder for the cops or Feds to extract if they get a hold of the computers. Encrypt the entire system (except for the boot partition) and create a strong password for the encryption program that is different than both the



Ubuntu login password and the database login password. Write these down so that people can find them easily but so that they can be destroyed quickly in the case of a raid and are not visible from windows. And never say them out loud. It also might be a good idea for only the legal support office bottomliners to have the login info, at least for the encryption login.

If people need to use their personal laptops, it's a good idea for them to back up all their personal documents on an encrypted thumb drive or something similar, scrub their hard drives to make it harder to recover their personal documents, create user accounts for the office that are different than their personal accounts, and encrypt their entire hard drives. In other words, we don't really recommend it. People should also avoid checking their personal email accounts from the office in case the cops steal the computers and crack the encryption. Lots of good info on how to do all this is available online and will explain things a lot better than we could in this zine.

Interwebs: As with computers, interwebs are a necessity in the legal support office. It's best to only use wired ethernet connections rather than having wireless. The security option on wireless networks is basically meaningless. If the

cops or Feds were so inclined, they could hack into your wireless connection and see everything that's going on in it, both from your wired and wireless computers.

Coldsnap only used wired connections in the legal support office during the RNC, although they had wireless in the office that was used for arrestee support organizing for several months after the RNC to make working there more efficient. There are ways that they could have gotten more techie with their interwebs too, though. One would have been getting online through Tor (<http://www.torproject.org>), which is a proxy server system that helps hide your physical location by routing your interwebs requests through three different servers before connecting to the website you're trying to view. This process makes it harder for the cops and Feds to find your physical location by tracing your electronic footprint from your interwebs activity. Using Tor will slow down your connection speed drastically, but the anonymity it provides could be helpful. Then again, since you'll likely have phone lines in the office and other avenues for the authorities to find your location, the hassles of using technologies such as Tor may not outweigh the benefits. As with everything else, you'll need to make the best decisions for your organizing and

security.

Phone list: A list of critical numbers should be in the office within sight of every phone. The flip charts or butcher paper and tape will come in handy for this. Some numbers to include on this sheet are:

¶ Ally organizations and individuals: Your local National Lawyers Guild chapter, Legal Observer dispatch hotline, movement lawyers, copwatch group, and other community orgs that can help with legal support efforts.

¶ Media working group contact: Staying in touch with the media working group is crucial, especially when they're preparing for press releases and conferences and need accurate data from the legal front.

¶ Bottomliners for all legal support operations: street team, jail vigil, technical assistance, etc. Make sure you only list the phone numbers the bottomliners will be using during the days of action (hopefully pre-paid, anonymous phones!) so the cops won't get their personal numbers if they raid the office.

¶ Medics and any community health resources: Having a health advocate for prisoners is really important; having a trans and queer-positive health advocate is crucial.

¶ Bail bonds services in the area:

Coldsnap did not have the capacity to coordinate bail from the legal support office, but if you can do it, go for it! Regardless of what you choose to do, have the numbers handy for volunteers to share with people who call the hotline.

The jail, including numbers for property return: Know where people are being jailed for state, federal, and juvenile charges, as well as where their stuff might be when they get out. During the RNC, there were arrests in both Minneapolis and St. Paul, which are inconveniently in two separate counties with two separate jails. Property that was seized in St. Paul was being held in one of three places: at the jail, at a facility on the other side of town, and at a facility in Bloomington (a suburb 30 minutes outside of St. Paul). You can get a lot of this information by calling the jail directly. Kindness goes a long way with the people who answer the phones there. The dispatchers may be working for the state, but they are wage laborers just the same and can often be helpful.

Raid response plan: In all your planning, don't forget to think about what to do in case the worst-case scenario happens and the legal support office gets raided. It's a good idea to have a plan for quickly removing and destroying all sensitive data in the event of a police raid. For example, if you get raided and have the opportunity to do anything about it, turn

off all the power strips that the computers are plugged into so the cops can't get to your data and have the lawyers grab the intake forms as attorney work product to help protect them.

Planning the Jail Vigil

A few weeks before the convention, Coldsnap started organizing a jail vigil to support people as they were released from jail. After the RNC, many people who were involved in the jail vigil or with Coldsnap received more thanks from arrestees for the jail vigil than virtually anything else.

Folks are gonna get arrested and incarcerated, be subjected to humiliation and dehumanization, possibly physically abused, they won't eat well, they won't sleep well, they might be wondering how the hell they're going to get home when they get released. They need your help, and it's the least you can do. This is important stuff right here.

A jail vigil is an enactment of mutual aid and support for the people targeted for arrest at actions/demos/spontaneous uprisings, etc. During a crazy hectic situation, the vigil becomes a place where people can gather to share

information, wait for their friends to be released, and experience community solidarity. Jail is designed to be an incredibly isolating experience that separates us from our communities, friends, and comrades. After hours or days of detainment, being released from jail to a cheering crowd and a cup of hot coffee is a powerful experience.

Most of the work for the jail vigil is done prior to actually arriving outside the jail. If you can prepare for the vigil ahead of time, you will be better able to offer support to released arrestees. Gather supplies, recruit bottomliners, and strategize with the legal team about possible arrestee coordination. Bottomliners should consider

minimizing their arrest risk, as getting arrested tends to screw up the plan. Be in touch with other protest support people (the communications and Indymedia folks, the food people, the medics, etc). If possible, find out if arrestees are planning jail solidarity and find out if any specific types of support are being requested. Research your town's permit laws. There might be a limit on how many people are legally allowed to gather. Remember, problems will come up and you can't plan everything, but having contingency plans is also a good idea. What will you do if the bottomliners get arrested? The vigil gets raided? The cops start driving

people to random street corners and releasing them there? (It happened here. It wasn't cool.)

You'll definitely need at least two or three jail vigil bottomliners (more is better, especially if you're planning for this to be an all-day, every-day operation; people gotta sleep). Creating shifts similar to the ones used in the office is a good idea, as is having a list of phone numbers for people who want to come hang out outside the jail. The bottomliners should be responsible for publicizing and organizing the vigil prior to the actions, setting up shop a couple hours after the first arrests happen, making sure people are there ALL THE TIME ALL THE TIME ALL THE TIME, sharing info with each other, and deciding when to end the vigil.

The bottomliners also need to be prepared to be police liaisons. Although it can hurt inside to be nice to the cops when they're taking part in holding your friends hostage, if you're bottomlining the jail vigil, your job is to keep it running. So being able to negotiate with the cops to keep the people at the vigil from being harassed or arrested can be a valuable skill. During the RNC, the people at the jail vigil had surprisingly good relations with the cops (for the most part) despite all the police brutality being inflicted on people elsewhere in the Twin

Cities. There was definitely harassment and intimidation (cops driving by with their sirens on, mounted cops lining up next to the vigil, etc.), but people were able to congregate there at all hours of the day and night to wait for their friends, in large part due to the efforts of the people who stepped into police liaison roles.

A good thing to have on hand is a "jail box" (or bag or whatever) that includes chocolate, cigarettes, tampons, public transit info, bondsperson info, and a phone that released arrestees can use to call their friends. A pre-paid, anonymous phone that is paid for collectively is a good idea, since otherwise individuals will get really giant phone bills. To repeat: make sure that the chocolate and cigarettes are well supplied. You'll also want plenty of copies of information from the legal team, such as outtake forms, police misconduct reports, and flyers about upcoming arrestee meetings. The outtake forms on which people provide information can help the legal support office track their court cases (if they're charged) and provide their lawyers with useful info (check out the one Coldsnap used in the Appendix). These should be taken to the legal support office by the bottomliners on a regular basis. Bring clipboards and pens!

There are lots of other good things to

have at the vigil at all times. A whole hell of a lot of regularly supplied coffee and hot food are both really important. You can work with the friendly Food Not Bombs folks from your town or with the Seeds of Peace folks if they're in town. Both groups will likely be more than happy to help feed people scooped up by the state. It's also good to have lots of clean clothes for people who were exposed to chemical agents and need something else to wear, as well as for people who come out shivering since jails are typically kept cold. Blankets for cold nights and for people to sleep on are also good. And don't forget about a message board for people to leave notes for their friends.

You'll also want to work with the National Lawyers Guild to have legal observers armed with cameras in case the cops try to mess with the vigil. It's great if some can be there at all times, but having them on call when they're needed could be sufficient. Also, the cops outside the jail may be really aggressive about preventing people from filming, so having the protections that can come from those bright green hats can come in handy, even if they're not able to do everything they normally do. Similarly, you should have medics on hand to treat people coming out of jail.

If you do not have the luxury of planning

ahead for your jail vigil, never fear! One amazing thing about coordinating a jail vigil is that folks who you have never met before will come forward with offers to help, bring food, run errands, etc. When you hear of a mass arrest and want to set up a vigil, call up your friends and get your asses down to the jail. You will usually have at least a few hours from the time people are arrested until folks begin to be released, so use this time to gather supplies and get the word out. If you don't know where people are being held, you can call in with their names and usually get the info you need. A vigil is a lot of waiting around, so once you arrive, you'll have the opportunity to make phone calls, get food brought down, find medics, etc. If you have nothing but yourself and a hug for the people being released from jail, that is wonderful and enough.

Everything else is just garnish.

Final thoughts: If you're one of the bottomliners, plan ahead about how you are going to take care of yourself in a very intense and stressful situation. Get sleep, even if the adrenaline is telling you that you don't need to. Ask for help when you need it. Eat lots of chocolate. Coordinating a jail vigil can be an incredibly rewarding personal experience, but you won't be able to appreciate it if you are completely frazzled. Be clear with yourself about

why you are doing this work. You cannot support anyone else if you do not take care of yourself first.

Logistical Meeting between Support Organizations

Another important part of organizing that occurred right before the RNC was a logistical meeting between support organizations that planned to play a role during the convention. In this meeting, people involved in different aspects of logistical support shared their plans with each other and had a chance to meet and talk about ways they could work together more cohesively and support each other's efforts.

Although this meeting happened just a couple weeks before the RNC, when most everyone was exhausted and overly stressed, it helped people figure out how to work together effectively and allowed them to meet face to face in a situation that didn't involve being surrounded by trigger-happy cops. Having this meeting significantly earlier in the pre-convention organizing with the opportunity for follow-up meetings (both as a group and as individuals decided they needed to meet with each other) would have been helpful, but it served its limited purpose effectively, all things considered.

SECTION

legal organizing during the RNC and its aftermath

running the legal support office



Plans have been made, materials gathered, work space arranged, phones and computers plugged in. It's time to start the show. This is when the jail support hotline starts to show exactly

how important it is. During the days of action, particularly after the arrests start happening, people are going to be calling the jail support hotline for all kinds of reasons. They will be tired,

pissed, confused, in a state of panic, in shock, calming down, etc. They may be activists calling you from the streets to let you know about some shit going down. They may be partners, children, lovers, parents, or friends of someone they can't find who are calling to see if that person has been arrested. People might call you as they are being gassed or brutalized by the police. The media may call you to check facts. There may be prank callers. Cops may call in false reports of arrests or actions the cops are taking to try to confuse or distract you. Or just to fuck with you. There will be people calling you as they're about to get arrested or once they've been booked. Folks will call you as they're being released.

You can expect all kinds of craziness to be happening at once in the office. The craziness might come in bursts, with plenty of down time in between, or may be continuous. However it comes at you, the stress levels will undoubtedly remain high. Your ability to calmly, pleasantly, and efficiently handle every call and every situation you encounter will be critical in your jail support work. Your first priority is to make people feel supported and safer while they're in a fucked up situation, so being as emotionally grounded as you can be is essential. Additionally, how you handle arrestee information will be the foundation from which you'll help people navigate the legal system to fight their criminal charges (if they are formally charged) or to begin civil litigation proceedings to sue the state for the bullshit they experienced. Move quickly, but take the time to get shit right.

In everything you do in the legal support office, remember that your actions and statements could seriously affect people's legal situations—most importantly, their freedom. Security culture starts before the first ring. Your phone line may be tapped. Even if it isn't, the jail phones are always being recorded. Please remember this and be sure to disclose it every time you answer the phone. People answering phones for

RNC legal support began each conversation with, "Coldsnap Legal. This line is not secure." Encourage people to tell you only what you need to know in order to support them and get them out of jail as quickly as possible. And don't hesitate to remind them that the line isn't secure if you think they might be sharing information that could incriminate themselves or other people.

managing the office

Now that you've figured out how you want to set up the office, you need to figure out how to work in it. You can expect the office to be a hectic, stressful environment full of surprises and quickly shifting needs and demands. Even so, there are several things you can do to help make it an effective environment.

Shifts: Creating a shift schedule is incredibly important, although shifts are probably the most likely thing to be ignored during the intense times you'll be spending in the office. Having three shifts a day (8 hours each) is a good idea, and you should have at least one experienced person on each shift. Once the arrests start happening and for several days afterwards, you'll probably need a lot of people in the office all at once, but having shifts gives people times when they can come in to help out

as well as times when they know they can leave to go eat, sleep, and otherwise care for themselves. They can also help people expect to hear a knock on the door so they don't freak out or over-react, which is way too easy when you're running on adrenaline and caffeine instead of sound sleep.

Information coordinators: These are the people on each shift who are responsible for keeping track of everything that's going on: arrest reports, reports of people being released, reports of raids on comms or medics or whoever, and other such things. These people pull all the info together, confirm reports as necessary, and disseminate info from the office to other people on the legal team (street team members, jail vigil bottomliners, lawyers, etc.), the media working group, and the public at large through Twitter, a blog, or whatever else is being used. They also make sure that everyone in the office knows what's going on. There should be one info coordinator per shift, and these people should make sure to talk to each other so everyone fully understands what's been going on.

Taking care of yourself and each other: Talking with other folks who will be working in the office about taking care of each other is one of the best things you can do before the calls start rolling

in. The people who will be working in the office will likely feel a great deal of responsibility for how things go and a strong desire to do everything in their power to help the people who are being brutalized and arrested by the cops in the streets. But there are ways to do that work without burning ourselves out or damaging our relationships with our friends in the process. Learning about each other's boundaries, needs, and goals, as well as ways each individual likes to receive support, can help keep communication open and healthy during times of stress. Know your boundaries and needs, and work to understand and respect others'.

the real work: supporting arrestees!

The most important part of running a legal support office is supporting arrestees. Most of this work will be done through talking with them on the phone. You may be the only person an arrestee is able to talk to from jail, so it's important that you do everything you can in the short time you'll have on the phone with them. Remember to remain calm and to fill out as much info on the Arrestee Intake Form (see Appendix) as possible, since that will be the basis of your ability to track people in the system until everyone is released. And

remember that jail phones are always tapped, so everything people say on the phone can be used against them!

When you're talking to an arrestee on the phone, make sure you get the following information:

Ⓐ Name the person is using. Getting the proper spelling is important, as well as their full legal name if they have given this to the cops.

Ⓐ Is this their first call? If so, fill out an arrestee intake form with them. Make sure you get as much information as you can, as quickly and as accurately as possible. If not, get right on the database. Update their file with whatever information they are sharing with you.

Ⓐ Date, time, and location of their arrest, as well as their arresting officer if they know that name.

Ⓐ Citation/charges, if they know them.

Ⓐ Support person and contact information, if they have one.

Ⓐ Medical concerns: Prescriptions required? Other medical needs? Are they in need of and receiving medical assistance?

Ⓐ Dietary concerns: Are they vegan? Allergic to anything? Getting the food they need in a timely manner? On hunger strike and in need of support?

Ⓐ Instructions for support: What other phone calls could office volunteers make to support them? Do they have children

or pets who require care while they are in jail and people who need to be called to arrange for this care?

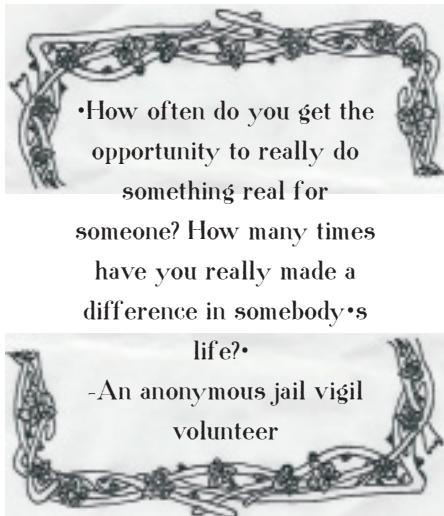
Ⓐ Other concerns: Is the person engaging in jail solidarity? Is there a date by which they need to be bailed out if they are not released? Do they need to be bailed ASAP? Is the person a minor? Queer? Trans? A person of color? At risk in some other way?

You might find that the questions you need to ask will depend on the situation you find yourself in. During the RNC, the people working in the legal support office found the above questions helpful.

They also worked hard to make outcalls to arrestees' support people, family members, and friends to help take care of them while they were in jail.

Receiving calls from arrestees and others as well as making calls on arrestees' behalves can require a lot of time, energy, and coordination, however, so you should do an honest assessment of your group's capacity and the needs you expect to be able to meet so you can decide what you're doing to do in terms of legal support and solidarity. It's better to do a few things well than everything in a mediocre way, so decide what you can and cannot do, communicate this to the community, and then do your best to follow through on that promise.

Running the Jail Vigil



During the week of the RNC, legal workers and volunteers ran a jail vigil to support arrestees as they were released. See the previous section for more in-depth ideas about setting such a beast up, but to summarize: A jail vigil serves two important functions. First, it helps provide support to arrestees immediately upon their release. People will likely be tired, hungry, thirsty, and cold. They may be upset, confused, lonely, and scared. They may find themselves in an unfamiliar location, possibly without any money or means of transport home. Volunteers at the jail vigil provided arrestees with food, coffee, cigarettes, chocolate, blankets, and friends, so they

had something good to come out to after being held hostage by the state for several hours or days. Second, folks were available to answer questions about the legal process and medics were there to care for people right away.

For those on the ground staffing the vigil, this experience can also be a great way to empower themselves and feel like they're making a concrete difference in the midst of what can be a dark, scary, disempowering situation. It can also be a space for continued political protest, though this choice escalates the risk for potential police repression and could pose a threat to the life of the vigil. So it pays to be intentional about the way you create and run the vigil.

Once the arrests start, it's time to get things going. Set up the vigil in sight of the door where people will be released so that they will be able to find you. Expect the cops to come out and ask you what the hell you are doing. Have a police liaison tell them that you plan to stay until all your comrades are released. This is a situation where de-escalation and negotiation are called for. Getting the jail vigil arrested doesn't help anyone and strains community support resources. While you are there, most of the time you will probably just be hanging out, waiting for people to be

released. The vigil is a great opportunity to get the word out about various events.

The jail vigil bottomliner and other volunteers during the RNC served important roles as police liaisons for the entire week, helping de-escalate many situations. Once, the cops lined up on horses in the parking lot next to the vigil and seemed to be preparing for aggressive action. Several volunteers at the vigil were able to talk with the cops and work with the people hanging out at the vigil to avoid a confrontation. Many other times, the cops called the jail vigil bottomliner when they wanted to complain about something at the vigil or just because they felt like they needed to bitch.

Arrestee Meetings



SOLIDARITY

It's good to have friends.

Part of the legal support organizing prior to the RNC was planning meetings for the people who were arrested during the convention. Planning these in advance of the convention was a great idea! After being arrested, people were angry, confused, and overwhelmed by the criminal injustice system. Arrestee meetings created the opportunities to provide people with more information about the legal process, show them the value of collective action to fight back, and help them find ways to become

active in their own defense and support.

Two meetings were planned for immediately after the convention: one during the weekend after the convention and one two weeks later. The meetings were facilitated to explain the situations people were likely to find themselves in as their cases wound their way through the courts, allow people to ask questions about the criminal injustice system in general, and provide for organizing time (which led to the formation of CRASS). NLG lawyers were also invited to the first two arrestee meetings to answer general questions people had.

During these meetings, we identified the

different working groups people were interested in having, who would bottomline them, and when and where the working groups would meet. We also set up the initial schedule for general assembly meetings so we could continue meeting as a large group. The first meeting was in the RNC Welcoming Committee's Convergence Space, so we had plenty of room for everyone. For the second meeting, which we held on a Sunday, the only space we could find was a library meeting room. This room turned out to be way too small for everyone who showed up. Planning for a larger space than we thought we needed would have been a good idea that time around.

Section 4: Framework and strategy Underlying CRASS

In the next two sections of our zine, we talk about the organizing we did to create and run an arrestee support structure. The preceding sections discussed the “why”—the events that we were responding to and the environment in which this all came to be. This section talks about the “how” behind our organizing—the political strategies and ideologies we tried to enact as we went about our work. Later on, in section 5, we’ll talk about the “what”—the specific things we did to enact these strategies and ideologies.

As we set about creating the organization that we ultimately named CRASS, we had several strategic and ideological considerations in mind. Some of these we discussed explicitly in the beginning of our work, some of them at distinct points along the way, and some of them continually throughout our organizing. There were also some that we worked from implicitly since they stemmed from a lot of the anarchist and anti-authoritarian organizing that many of us had been involved in prior to the RNC. However we approached or dealt with them, though, they were integral to our organizing and to our relationships with each other.

Not everyone involved in CRASS identified as anarchist or anti-authoritarian, of course, so people came from a range of political orientations. There was also diversity in age,

race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and education. Our differences led to problems within the group at times, but our common purpose mostly helped us push through conflict and tension in ways that led to us becoming stronger in the end.

This work wasn't easy. Much of it was painful and stressful. Some of it seemed to distract us from the tactical work we needed to accomplish to provide support to arrestees. But what we kept coming back to, time and time again, was the importance of working with each other in ways that provided the support we wanted to provide to all arrestees and allies and that combated the systems of oppression that we were all fighting against. The way we worked was just as important as the work we were doing; we had to confront oppressive behaviors and tendencies within ourselves in order to combat them in the world outside of us. At some level, we all knew that if we failed in working together in ways that further liberation, we could achieve some tactical victories in the courts but remain strictly on the defensive. To both support ourselves and further the movement, we had to enact our principles in all of our work and relationships.

We tried to do this. In many ways, we succeeded. And we learned many lessons along the way when we failed.

Some of the principles underlying our organizing were solidarity, community self-defense, and mutual aid. These are principles that many communities and organizations around the world have acted on in the face of oppression, and were inherent to much of the organizing done to resist the RNC. We also intentionally worked from an anti-oppression and anti-authoritarian framework, which shaped the way we conducted meetings and made decisions, among other things. Part of this was using consensus procedure and facilitation during meetings. We also attempted to organize according to good security culture practices to help protect ourselves and our communities from further repression and targeting.

Solidarity, Community Self-Defense, and Mutual Aid

CRASS is not a unique organization. It is part of a history of support for people arrested at mass demonstrations, as seen after other large summits such as the WTO in Seattle in 1999 and the RNC in New York City in 2004, to name just two well-known examples. It is also part of a larger movement of political prisoner support here in the United States and throughout the world. Some well-known examples of this work are the support structures for Mumia Abu-Jamal, Leonard Peltier, Carlos Alberto Torres (as of this writing, he is scheduled for parole in July 2010 after 30 years of unjust imprisonment),

Dhoruba bin Wahad, the San Francisco 8, the AETA 4, and (closer to home for Minneapolis) the Minnesota 8 and the RNC 8. (This list could go on much longer, of course.) Solidarity with people who have been targeted by the state was integral to our work.

We also endeavored to be in solidarity with the people who face state repression on a daily basis, which too often tends to be poor people, people of color, and other people who are marginalized and terrorized because of perceived differences between them and those in power. We were acutely aware of the differences between the repression many arrestees faced in the streets of Minneapolis and St. Paul over the course of about a week in September and the repression that many people face simply because they are black or brown or queer or trans or poor or...this list goes on too long, unfortunately. But the struggles in which many people were engaged out in these streets over those days are tied into the struggles people have when they're just walking or driving down the streets near their homes on any given day. Some of the people involved with CRASS and supported by CRASS came from those communities and regularly dealt with this repression in their own lives. When making our organizing decisions and representing ourselves to the world at large, we tried to keep both these connections and these differences in the forefront of our thoughts, words, and actions.

CRASS also fits into a rich history of community self-defense, which includes notable instances of this type of organizing such as the work done by the Black Panthers and the community-run barricades in Oaxaca, Mexico that were designed to protect neighborhoods from the state. This work was also a continuation of much of the organizing done in the Twin Cities and elsewhere in anticipation of the RNC, as many people and communities foresaw the harm the convention could do to the residents of the cities. While CRASS's work differed drastically from the type of work that some other organizations have done, the underlying idea of communities coming together to protect their best interests in the face of violent state repression is not unique to CRASS. Indeed, it's all too necessary in the world we inhabit today.

Finally, CRASS is part of a wide range of organizations that practice mutual aid, the idea that we're all able to take care of each other to meet all our needs rather than competing with each other to hoard resources so some of us can live well at the expense of everyone else. People from around the nation donated money to us to benefit arrestees. Honoring the intent of their sacrifices and contributions, we made the best decisions we could to offer support to everyone who had been arrested at the RNC. We also worked to provide housing for people who had to return to the cities because of their charges. By

contributing what we could and sharing what we had, we were able to take care of each other when we were being forced into the criminal injustice system, which relies on isolation, intimidation, and disempowerment to help the state maintain control over the people.

We also attempted to take care of each other in the wake of tremendous emotional, psychological and physical trauma after the RNC. People suffered all kinds of trauma in the streets and jail, some of which we were equipped to deal with and support each other through and some of which we were not. We were fortunate to have allies to draw on to help us support each other in this regard. For example, folks from North Star Health Collective and other sympathetic health practitioners scheduled a bodywork and personal care day so people could benefit from different services for free. Their generosity and solidarity filled a gap that we were not able to fill on our own and helped contribute to the well-being of many people in CRASS and throughout our community.

These principles were at the heart of much of our work. They were also inherent to our court solidarity strategy, which we promoted from the beginning of our time organizing together. We encouraged people to realize that we had strength in numbers and that, although the courts are designed to make us feel like isolated individuals, we were all in this together. Ramsey County, where most of

the 818 arrests occurred, had a budget for about 60 misdemeanor trials for 2008 and about the same number for 2009. They simply couldn't afford to take everyone facing charges to trial. This reality created an opportunity for us to fight back together to benefit both ourselves and others.

Our court solidarity strategy laid out the realities of the system and its constraints, as well as the benefits of arrestees showing solidarity with each other. And it encouraged people to keep solidarity in mind while making the decisions they needed to make in their lives. While we realized the strategic value of solidarity, we also recognized that not everyone had the privilege to fight their charges to the bitter end. We did not want our strategy to be coercive, so we used it as part of the framework underlying our organizing but not as a requirement for people to receive assistance from us or benefit from the work we were doing.

Anti-Oppression Framework and Anti-Authoritarian Organizing Model

Our desire not to be coercive also extended to the ways in which we interacted and organized with each other. An anti-oppression framework and anti-authoritarian organizing model were at the heart of our work. CRASS worked on consensus (explained in more detail later) and had no leaders. We tried to create an environment in which all could contribute equally to the

decisions being made and work being done, despite the privileges we did or did not bring into the group (e.g., race, age, class, gender, education).

Equality should not be confused with uniformity, though, as certain people gravitated towards certain types of work and some people were more active than others. But when making decisions, we worked hard to ensure that everyone had the same opportunities to contribute their thoughts, voice their concerns, and shape the proposals consensed upon by the group. When talking with each other in meetings, we used facilitation processes to structure our conversations, both to keep our already-long meetings somewhat more manageable as well as to create space for everyone to contribute in ways they were comfortable with. And we worked to check our own behaviors and the ways they affected others, realizing that combating systems of oppression has to start from within.

Desire is easier than realization, though. There were plenty of times when we failed to live up to our ideals for interacting with each other. There were plenty of times when we let each other and ourselves down. There were plenty of times when we perpetuated the systems of oppression that we were working so hard against, that we had been raised to think were just and natural.

One time in particular stands out in many of

our memories. Disagreements arose in meetings and over listservs about tactics CRASS should or should not engage in. The discussions about those tactics were not all that important in the overall scheme of our work, but the ways in which they unfolded had a significant impact on us. Several oppressive behaviors flared up in the discussions, particularly in terms of using privilege to control the course of the conversations and silence dissenting opinions. After a series of increasingly heated emails, a proposal was made that the discussion be moved off the listserv and into the next spokescouncil meeting. Not everyone respected this request, however, which added to the emotional stress of the email exchange. One organizer asked to be removed from the listserv, at least temporarily, because of the exchange.

At the next spokescouncil meeting, we had an outside facilitator come to help us address both the incident at hand and the power dynamics and systemic oppressions underlying it. Having an outside facilitator who was known and trusted by many people in the group was valuable because this relationship helped us focus on the issues we needed to address together without feeling like we were being told what to do, how to behave, or what to value.

This conversation proved helpful and healthy, as we were able to address the issues in productive ways, reflect on the ways in

which we were affecting each other, and figure out what we could do in the future. One thing we decided to do as a group was to attend an anti-oppression training. We selected a facilitator from a local anti-racism group and scheduled a date. Many of us were able to attend along with many members from our community who were not directly involved with CRASS.

This training, while beneficial in some ways and lacking in others, was an integral part of our time with each other since it helped us further analyze the ways we relied on our privileges in our interactions with each other as well as how our behaviors oppressed others. And it was something that we were able to do together to work with each other in liberatory ways, showing that we were dedicated to dealing with our shit and not allowing the dominant culture to continue dictating how we interact with and contribute to the world around us.

Consensus Procedure and Facilitation

As we talked about a bit before, an important aspect of our organizing was using consensus procedure to facilitate our meetings and make decisions as a group. Consensus is a decision-making process intended to include everyone making the decision. Instead of voting for an item and simply having the majority get their way, the group is committed to finding solutions that everyone can live with. This way, everyone's opinions,

ideas, and reservations are considered. For each meeting, we had at least one facilitator who helped the conversations along by using these processes:

1 As a group, **define** the decision needing to be made. This should be done in a way that separates the questions from the personalities. Focus on the decision, not the people.

2 **Discuss** the problem as a group. This conversation should allow for questions, clarifications, and brainstorming potential courses of action.

3 Once a solution has been articulated, state it in the form of a **proposal** so that everyone in the group is clear on the decision.

4 **Ask** if anyone has any concerns or questions. Ensure that these questions are answered and concerns discussed. If necessary, modify the proposal and restate it.

5 **Ask** if there are any **blocks**. A block means that someone feels strongly that the group would be making a mistake by adopting the course of action proposed, and that they personally could not support such a decision. If someone blocks the proposal, they should speak to their concerns. The facilitator(s) should then check with the group to see if the decision-making process should be tabled or started over.

6 Ask if there are any **stand-asides**. A stand-aside means that someone is not entirely comfortable with the decision or is ambivalent about it, but does not wish to block. If someone stands aside, they should be given the opportunity to speak to their reasons for doing so. The facilitator(s) should check with the group to see if friendly amendments should be made or if they should check for consensus.

7 Ask if there is **consensus** on the proposal. It's important that the consensus be strong (i.e., not an inordinate number of stand asides).

We also used hand signals to help the conversation along without verbally interrupting each other or distracting others. The signals we used, and their meanings, are listed below:

Keeping stack: Raise your hand if you want to speak, and the facilitator will point to you and put you on the “stack” of speakers in order behind anyone else who raised their hand before you.

Showing agreement: To show agreement with a statement without interrupting the speaker with a verbal agreement, you can twinkle (sometimes



called using metal fingers) by wiggling your fingers with your palm facing your body.



Direct response: When someone asks a question that you know the answer to, you can move your hands back and forth with your index fingers pointed out. Directly responding jumps stack, so it should only be used to answer questions people ask. If you simply disagree with a statement, raise your hand to get on stack.

Technical point: Put your hands in a “T” shape to correct a statement or fact (such as a specific date). A technical point also jumps stack.



Point of process: Put your fingers in a triangle gesture to bring attention to a procedural issue that needs to be addressed (e.g., the conversation has gone off topic, vibe check, time check). A point of process also jumps stack.



While checking for consensus, we used the following hand signals:

Thumb up/Twinkling: Agree
Thumb down: Disagree/block
Thumb to the side: Stand aside

Security Culture

Since our organizing was in response to overt state repression, we were aware of the importance of working with each other in ways that did not create more opportunities for our enemies to oppress us. In part, this entailed working with good security culture practices in mind. History and our own experience show us that as movements become more effective, government surveillance and harassment increase. We saw this firsthand as the RNC was approaching; we now know that the RNC Welcoming Committee had been infiltrated by multiple government agencies for more than a year prior to the convention.

Security culture is a big part of how people in movements can keep themselves and their friends safer. It means being aware of actions and behaviors that can put people at risk and create opportunities for state repression, as well as educating people about how their actions and behaviors can help protect the community or put it at risk. Security culture is a way to build strong communities that can work together to combat state repression at every turn.

Why practice security culture? Let's face some facts here. If what we do were easy, safe and popular, we wouldn't need to do it.



Part of our job (maybe the first part of our job) is to have each others' backs in our struggles. Effective, proactive and positive security culture gives us a powerful means to do this. When we can feel safe together, when we can work together in love and trust, there is no limit to what we can achieve. We've proven it again and again. With these truths in mind, we worked to practice good security culture to strengthen our organizing while further protecting and empowering ourselves.

As such, we tried to:

Actively create safer spaces by respecting the people who inhabit and embody those spaces, and be ever mindful that our movement is made up of varied and diverse groups of people, all of whom may have different boundaries, comfort zones, and levels of commitment.

Speak deliberately, intentionally, and confidentially to others when they need to know about our plans, actions, wants and needs.

Respect and maintain the privacy of ourselves, our allies, and the larger community. Confidentiality is our default.

Keep our comrades and community informed if we encounter or suspect harassment, interrogation, or surveillance.

Stay aware of actions, our own and others', that can put our community at risk.

Proactively and responsibly address breaches of security culture by explaining to our friends and allies (strangers too) how irresponsible comments or actions can jeopardize the safety of individuals or the group as a whole.

We also worked not to:

Say anything to a group or individual we don't know and trust that we wouldn't be comfortable seeing published in a newspaper or being questioned about in a court of law.

Share information on direct action or civil disobedience (past or present, actual or desired) with anyone who is not directly

involved in those activities.

Spread rumors or misinformation about alleged illegal activities or plans to commit illegal activities, whether out of ignorance or a desire to harm someone politically, socially or legally.

Spread rumors or misinformation about someone being an informant, infiltrator or agent provocateur (this is called "snitch-jacketing" or "bad-jacketing").

Use security culture as an excuse for exclusionary or hurtful behavior. If you think

that someone's words or actions need to be addressed, you should strive to educate this person in a way that does not affect their pride or come off as "holier-than-thou." If possible, this should be done in private soon after the mistake so the person doesn't feel humiliated by a public reprimand.

Allow people who have been repeatedly informed of how their actions and words have harmed others or put them at risk continue to act in irresponsible or harmful ways. A community response may be warranted in these circumstances to help everyone stay as safe as possible.

Section 5: Structure of CRASS

Meetings

Providing effective arrestee support takes a lot of organizing, which requires meetings of arrestees and their allies. The focus of the first meetings should be creating the support structure itself. Ideally, this could happen before the mass arrest. If that's not possible, you can plan arrestee meetings for immediately after the days of action. We had our first meeting a couple days after the last day of the convention, and then a second meeting two weeks later.

In these initial meetings, we also defined the meeting schedule for CRASS as a whole. The schedule changed several times over the course of our work, but for most of the time we had regular spokescouncil and general assembly meetings. The spokescouncil, consisting of the working group bottomliners and anyone else who was interested, met every week to approve travel fund requests, give updates, plan the agenda for the general assembly, and plan events and actions. The general assembly, a much larger body, met every other week, after the spokescouncil. These meetings were for making decisions that affected arrestees as a whole (using funds in new ways, for example), providing people with updates, and helping people find ways to become involved in arrestee support.

Additionally, each working group

decided on how often it would meet to do its work. Some found that weekly meetings were necessary for quite some time, while others were able to do a lot of their work without meeting in person on a regular basis.

We found that it was best to keep meetings to the minimum necessary to accomplish the work at hand. As the work wound down, we felt it was appropriate to meet less often. Most of our working groups met weekly at first and switched to biweekly meetings or stopped meeting altogether as the need decreased. For example, we eventually stopped holding general assembly meetings as the attendance dwindled down to mostly people who attended the spokescouncils as well. We also held spokescouncil meetings bi-weekly instead of weekly. Later, we stopped having regular

spokescouncils, switching instead to small weekly "working meetings" where people could get together and work on various projects.

Attendance at these meetings was poor and they did not last for very long. After that, most of our organizing work was done over the listserv.

The system outlined above is the one that mostly worked well for us, but it was not the first one that we tried. At first, we had a separate working group called the steering committee that attempted to coordinate the efforts of the different working groups and create a cohesive whole. Quickly realizing the problems that this structure caused and its lack of alignment with the anti-authoritarian, consensus-based organizing model we wanted to use, we abandoned this model in favor of the spokescouncil. This was definitely the best decision for our organizing, work, and relationships with each other. Although it seemed obvious to many of us after the fact, in the crazy, stressful weeks after the RNC, we weren't able to make the best decisions all the time. We made mistakes and had to remain flexible to maintain a comfortable environment where people could

voice their concerns freely so we could evolve into a structure that was effective and acceptable to the people involved.

Obviously, it is desirable to find a meeting location that is easy enough for everyone to get to. We also found that the type of meeting space can make a really big impact on how meetings go and how people feel about going to them. Our various working groups met at different kinds of places, each with their own benefits and drawbacks, including:

★ Libraries: All of our general assemblies and spokescouncil meetings were at public libraries. Large meeting rooms were available for free.

★ Legal Support Office: Offered a smaller meeting place with more privacy. Also "free" (in the sense that it had already been paid for for other uses).

★ Cafes: Coffee and foodstuffs available, which may mean a more pleasant, friendly environment. However, there is usually an expectation (on the part of the owners) that someone has to buy something, and not everyone is

willing or able to pay for overpriced coffee. There are coffee shops out there that will leave you alone as long as most of the people in the group buy something, but people may still feel uncomfortable if they perceive pressure to buy something.

★ Bars: Meeting at bars may be a great idea or a terrible idea, depending on who is in your group. The drawbacks may be numerous and include loss of focus or productivity, obnoxious behavior, and all the other problems that happen when people drink too much. Not everyone is okay with being around alcohol use, so they

may feel uncomfortable or avoid the meetings entirely. You may also be excluding people who can't legally drink. And it's expensive (again with the pressure to buy stuff). Despite all this, it can have its benefits. It can make the meetings more enjoyable for some and improve attendance (after all, they have beer there). Most of the planning for this zine was done at a bar, so make of that what you will.

Wherever you choose to meet, it is critical that everyone in the group feels comfortable in that space. Be prepared to change it up if that's what the group needs.

Working Groups

Hospitality

Fighting charges could mean traveling back to the area of arrest for court dates. It can be difficult to get arrestees back in town if they live in a different area, state, or country. In order to overcome this issue, CRASS formed the hospitality group. The group members took on the task of trying to get all of them back in town and hook them up with a place to stay while there. Of course, it can take quite a bit of money to help cover travel expenses for such a large number of people. The fundraising and hospitality groups were rather intertwined for a short period of time for that reason.

The first thing to arrange was housing near the courthouse. While it may seem strange to work on local lodging before figuring out

travel, it was the easiest thing we could resolve. We decided the best way to arrange for housing was to start a website to let people post

their need for a place to stay or for anyone from the local area willing to make their home available to those visiting. Luckily for us, the RNC Welcoming Committee had previously created a website to connect people traveling to the RNC with local housing during the convention. It was much easier to piggyback on something already created that was meant for nearly the same purpose. This site meant that those looking for housing would have to regularly check the website to see new offerings. Everyone involved felt the more that was left up to the individual wanting to come back and the less work for the organizers to do, the more sustainable it would be. Other requests were soon added, such as, "I live in Ohio and don't have a car. Is there anyone driving this way who could pick me up and bring me to St. Paul? I'll cover part of the gas expenses." After everything was up and running, one of the hospitality members periodically checked the site to edit or delete postings.

The next thing to do was find out who needed access to funds for coming back for court dates. An application was established for fund requests (see Appendix). CRASS's

weekly newsletter, which was sent to participating arrestees and supporters, included instructions on who to email in order to get the application. All of the applications received were put before the spokescouncil for approval.

The basic criteria we used to evaluate requests were the severity of the charges and the applicant's economic hardships: people facing serious charges and who were seriously broke got priority. No one was made to feel that they would have to stick through with a not-guilty plea until trial or do anything else to "deserve" travel funds. Our mutual aid had no strings attached. At the time of this writing, we have given out thousands of dollars in travel funds and have consistently heard from folks about how remarkable this program was and how unusual after mass arrest events.

We also used these funds to support those who were eventually incarcerated. Virtually everything in jail costs money, including things as crucial to an inmate's connection to the outside world as stamps and envelopes. Inmates have access to what's known as "commissary" to buy necessities.

CRASS set up a system for commissary funds, doled out to individuals in \$50 increments based on need or upon request. This is an absolutely critical use of prisoner support money: as we've repeated over and over, the entire criminal injustice apparatus is designed to isolate and alienate those it ensnares. Making sure our comrades had the ability to purchase what they needed inside the clink was a vital aspect of the mutual aid we hoped to provide.

The financial side of hospitality required a lot of infrastructure that Coldsnap was able to provide to CRASS. Coldsnap was registered as a non-profit corporation within the state of Minnesota and had a business bank account, post office box, and PayPal account. (A cautionary note: PayPal froze the Coldsnap account and the accounts of other radical groups in the Twin Cities shortly after the RNC, so it's important to move your money out of PayPal as soon as you can and to fight like hell to get your account active again if necessary!) This infrastructure was used for fundraising as well as writing checks and withdrawing cash for travel fund payments. Having business standing was crucial since

we were handling large sums of money. No one needs those kinds of funds going through their personal accounts and running the risk of raising eyebrows down at the IRS.

Another important task was actually getting the arrestees to and from the courthouse. Bus route maps, bike trail maps, locations of food shelves, fun things to do during downtime, and other places of possible interest were all made available to those who came back. Although most had their own transportation, it was a good idea to try to cover all the bases.

Lastly, the group contemplated establishing a phone number to call if there were problems with the housing arrangements. This meant that either the person staying in the house or the one who was offering it could let us know if it wasn't working out so that we could try to defuse a potentially bad situation. The emergency phone number idea was born out of fear that someone might be paired up with an undercover informant, an ax murderer, or anybody else as equally unwelcome. It was going to be carried out by buying a prepaid cell phone and having someone

staff the phone 24 hours a day. While it was a good thought at the time, nothing came to fruition from the idea because it brought about too many complications with who might carry the phone, along with who to contact and what actions would be taken if there was someone who called with a problem.

The efforts of the hospitality working group were not simply

Fundraising

And it all costs money, honey, especially really important stuff like having a travel fund and providing commissaries for those held prisoner by the state. This money was raised through donation pleas and a variety of fundraising events organized by supporters across the country, as well as by our fundraising working group.

More than half of our total funds were raised before CRASS was officially formed. In the days leading up to, during, and following the RNC, arrestees and their allies sent out donation pleas that explained how many people had been arrested and why, and why donations were needed. It certainly helped that the RNC was a huge national event with lots of publicity, and folks around the country held their own fundraisers and sent us the money. Members of CRASS continued to send out donation pleas through our

instances of mutual aid, but its very definition. The court system and the state assume as a matter of course that those arrested will comply when their name is called. By providing the basic resources necessary to fight their unjust charges, we helped our comrades resist and defend not only their own rights, liberty, and dignity, but those of us all. The overwhelming dismissal of charges speaks for itself.

announcement listserv, Indymedia, Infoshop, personal email networks, and word of mouth. This was our simplest and most effective means of fundraising.

CRASS's fundraising group, which did some awesome work and raised some money, did not last very long. Although the official working group fell apart, having "our own" group turned out to not be entirely necessary, as people from all over continued to hold fundraisers.

The actual logistics of fundraising

can be really difficult, so having people with previous experience, or at least seeking the advice of such people, is strongly advised. While the planning may be difficult, the fundraisers themselves can and should be a lot of fun. Our fundraising events included benefit shows, house parties, movie screenings, and a snowball war (a note to our non-northern comrades: a "snowball" is a compact ball of crystallized... oh, forget it). We also printed some wicked cool T-shirts and sold them at meetings, fundraising events, and the local infoshop.

In addition to raising money, a really good fundraiser can be a highly effective form of outreach. We found that a well-planned and publicized benefit show can be successful in attracting a much broader audience than might normally come to fundraising events. This gave us the opportunity to educate more people about what was happening, and provided a larger pool from which to draw donations and volunteers.

To attract a larger crowd, it may be helpful to put on a show where the different sets are from different genres to attract people with wildly differing tastes in music. Booking a person or group with a fan base in your area also helps to draw a larger crowd of people who wouldn't otherwise know about or be interested in your cause.

In the spirit of constructive self-reflection: one problem that may have plagued the fundraising group from the start was that maybe we thought too big, too early. When



we failed to meet our own expectations, we kind of tanked. Be realistic about your own capabilities as a group. If your group is fortunate enough to have a broad talent base to draw on, by all means go crazy, give them hell. But if you're maybe a few people

Courtwatch

Going to court can be some scary shit, and no one should have to go through it alone. The primary purpose of courtwatch is to provide support to arrestees as they go through this process. Due to the importance of this work and the possibility of agents of the state harassing courtwatchers, as well as the necessity of database security, it's critical that courtwatch be strictly and explicitly a legal support group and nothing else. This also makes it a great place for more vulnerable and/or "risk-averse" folks to plug in.

Courtwatchers keep track of upcoming court dates, communicate with arrestees to learn their needs, and create a presence in the courtroom to give emotional support and show the judge, prosecutor and jury (during trials) that the community cares about the case and is paying attention. They also observe the proceedings and report back on what's going on in the courts. To do this, they need to familiarize themselves with the court systems in their area.

The first thing that needs to

who are pretty good at a few things, stick with what you're good at and do a lot of it. The concerts were amazing in terms of both fundraising effectiveness and movement building. We could have done way more of them.

happen is to find out who is going to court. We found fellow arrestees in the following ways:

• Arrestees had filled out forms for Coldsnap. There were pre-arrest forms people filled out if they thought they were going to be arrested, jail intake forms filled out by Coldsnap as people called in from jail, and jail outtake forms filled out at the jail vigil once people were released (see Appendix).

• People contacted us on their own. People learned about

courtwatch (and CRASS itself) through flyers, the interwebs, or through friends. CRASS had a website and each working group had its own email address.

¶ First appearances at court. People arrested at the same time or place may have first appearances on the same day. These people can be approached before or after their first appearance at court.

¶ People arrested at the same time or place may have consecutive case numbers, so if you know some case numbers from a particular event, you can search similar numbers and see what you get.

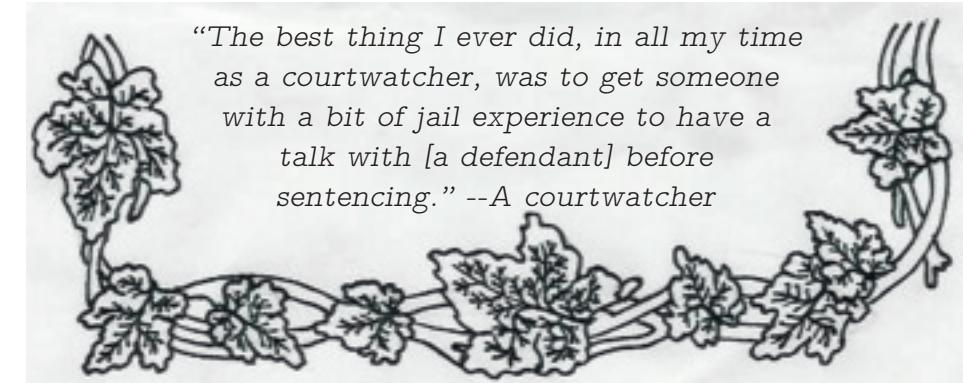
¶ If we had a name, we found we could get a case number by searching on the Ramsey County website at first, but later this service was no longer available and we were only able to search by case number. Be aware of how your local jurisdiction deals with this shit, and remember that the availability of this information is subject to change.

¶ A computer at the courthouse offered much better search options than what was available online.

The information about who is going to court, and when, should be logged and organized in a format that is easy to access and use. We used an online calendar to keep track of court appearances. On each day, we included the names, case numbers, courtrooms, buildings, and times. The calendar was very useful in divvying up the load and keeping track of who would attend each appearance. For arraignments, two people were scheduled for each appearance, in case one person was unable to make it.

In order to provide the best support, Courtwatch needs to find out what kind of support the defendants want. Contacting the defendant before their first appearance would be ideal, but often the first contact that Courtwatch had with a defendant was at their first court appearance. Depending on personal circumstances and the severity of the charges, defendants may wish to have a large number of supporters at their appearances. In these cases, people from the larger group were encouraged to attend. In some cases, however, the defendant or their lawyer may wish to avoid association with a legal

"The best thing I ever did, in all my time as a courtwatcher, was to get someone with a bit of jail experience to have a talk with [a defendant] before sentencing." --A courtwatcher



support group or political movements. They may feel, for instance, that such associations might prove detrimental to their cases. Or, they may be concerned that any publicity for the case, especially the kind that will come up in an online search, could prove harmful to the defendant by damaging their reputation. It's essential that Courtwatch always respect these wishes.

Courtwatchers observe what's going on in court and report back to the larger group on any trends. We had a form that courtwatchers could fill out to document what happened: irregularities, dirty tricks from the prosecution, what sorts of defenses seem to be effective or ineffective, judges' reactions, etc. All this stuff should be noted and communicated to the general assembly, so that others

going to court can be better prepared. For instance, we found that cops' testimony referenced issues involving the Welcoming Committee and the ongoing persecution of the RNC8. Another important thing Courtwatch did was to put lawyers from different cases in touch with each other and let them know what was happening with similar cases.

In order to make all this happen and to avoid problems, take the time to become as familiar as possible with the local court system. There are rules about appropriate behavior and dress in court, and it is critical that these be understood. There will be variation between courts in this respect, but there may also be variation between judges in terms of how far you will be allowed to stretch these rules and what will

get you kicked out. It's also important to understand how the information about the day's appearances is displayed at the courthouse. Courtroom assignments are subject to change, so it's a good idea to double check when you get there. Also, know where the different courthouses are and which one you need to be at for a particular appearance.

The importance of having just one supporter, even at something like an arraignment for a misdemeanor, should not be underestimated.

People who have been mass

arrested may not be familiar with the court system or know their rights. Simply reminding people that they have a support system behind them, and that the prosecution must be able to prove that the defendant is guilty, may be enough to convince a person to fight their charges when they might otherwise just accept a deal. It's also important to remember that Courtwatch is there to provide support and not to judge. Support should be provided to everyone who wants it, even if that person takes a deal or pleads guilty.

Felony Support

After the RNC, around twenty people were facing the tribulations and dreadful uncertainty of felony charges. Many were from out of town, three held in federal penitentiaries, and more entrapped due to the manipulation and work of informants. People gathered at the first arrestee meeting to focus on supporting those who were facing felonies and address the immediate needs of those who were still in custody. The group started out encompassing felony/high-risk folks, which originally included people facing immigration and citizenship issues, gross misdemeanor, and transpeople. The group ended up focusing on felony support as there just weren't many "high risk" cases to help. Support for the RNC 8 has been largely undertaken by a separate group.

Felony Support was different and sort of separate from the rest of the CRASS working groups for a number of reasons. This was occasionally to the chagrin of other

people in CRASS, but the reasons were legitimate. People facing felonies were fewer in number but more affected by their situations, and needed specific direct

attention. No one wanted a situation in which people facing misdemeanors would be OK and those facing felonies would be left out to dry. The people who were interested in felony support felt they would need a separate space for organizing to keep up the public pressure to have those charges dropped or for there to be any decent plea deals offered.

The group functioned like most other CRASS working groups and reported to the spokescouncil and general assembly. Often, any information the group had to offer was already provided by the hard work of Courtwatch. There was not very much direct interaction between Felony Support and the other working groups. There was also paranoia of informants being around and uncertainty about how the different cases would play out. While the open nature of CRASS was awesome and while one of its major accomplishments was involving people who had not been core RNC organizers, this approach necessitated caution.

Felony Support became a semi-closed group after awhile. There wasn't so much a policy making it closed as a small group of people who knew each other or got to know each other after

the RNC, liked working with each other, and decided not to actively recruit more people into the group. This led to a working group of three to eight following three to up to about a dozen felony cases at once. Most defendants ended up taking plea agreements. Some group members see this as a failure, while others acknowledge that a pre-trial agreement can be the best outcome. Dave Mahoney is a good example of a plea deal being what is best for the defendant but slightly damaging to others. Dave's conviction has and is being used against the RNC 8, but he served two months instead of years in jail. There were two non-RNC 8 defendants who went to trial and subsequently lost. Felony Support was not prepared to help people through trial, and while going to trial makes it possible for defendants to clear up fabrications and embellishments made by the State, it also puts a person in a more vulnerable position. Additionally, the group had largely disintegrated by the time these cases went to trial.

The semi-closed nature of the group contributed to it being stretched thinner than it should have been. The working group also

only had regular meetings for a few months. The fall following the RNC was spent figuring out whose felony charges were going to stick, what their cases were like, getting in touch with them, and asking how they could be supported. Each felony defendant had a working group member specifically assigned to keep track of their case and be in communication with them. During meetings, folks would report what they had learned from the defendants and then discuss it as a group. But the defendants often didn't know what they needed or how they could be helped, and thus Felony Support was left without direction.

One of the biggest troubles the group had was figuring out what to do if they weren't going to get involved in the legal side of the cases. Most people needed money for lawyers and travel for those who lived outside of Minnesota. They appreciated people being at their court dates and hearing about what was going on with other felony cases, but didn't ask for much more. Felony Support continually asked: How can we do to actually affect these people's situation? How can we confront the State in a way that has immediate, practical outcomes? How can we make ourselves into a force that can

handle State repression?

These questions led the group towards larger contextual discussions and perhaps were indicative of the difference between being a post-RNC support group and a group of socially critical friends. Over its existence, the group was one, then the other, and both. There were multiple discussions about the purpose of the group, which led back to its origin as a working group of CRASS. The structure and focus of the group could've been more consistent and applicable to those facing charges. While people put in a lot of energy and did the best they could, it didn't amount to much for the defendants.

In retrospect, some people feel it would have been better to push the defendants to meet with people aside from their lawyers to get other perspectives about how to handle their cases and to think about media, fundraising, and other support needs. It's important to realize that most lawyers won't offer a perspective aimed at building political resistance. Lawyers tried to get what was "best" for their clients, often pushing for early deals instead of a

going through a potentially severe trial and overlooking how any specific case was related to another. They would go as far as encouraging distance between a defendant and their would-be supporters. Felony Support could have done a much better job of providing alternative perspectives and resources, regardless of how they were utilized.

Political support, some feel, could have helped people use their cases constructively. Many defendants did not wish to have their names or stories associated with activist or anarchist support. Not publicizing names ended up costing some people a lot of support and publicity. This approach also allowed the state to better frame the story of their cases. It is unclear if political pressure could have affected much change in any one defendant's case, but felony convictions are definitely being used against the RNC 8.

The group focused a lot on providing practical support for the people facing felonies. Folks would go to each other's court dates, host people coming into town for hearings and trials, and things like that. The group could've acted as a structure for people in similar situations to be in touch with each other. Most of

the defendants didn't have their own support groups and others had lots of friends trying to help in an uncoordinated fashion. The group did some things really well, especially people checking in with each other. The people involved generally felt taken care of and were able to form affinity within the group.

The emotional support was limited in some ways, though. When the group stopped providing that support, it stopped meeting. Most of the people facing felonies weren't at meetings because they lived out of town or were in jail. The people who were there could have outreached better to the other people facing felonies to communicate that emotional support was a function the group could serve. There are limitations in providing emotional support to people you haven't established relationships with yet. The temporary and sudden nature of the group limited their ability to extend support and to influence the direction people were headed. Some members of the group felt strongly about how defendants should handle their cases but couldn't communicate that well in the group, let alone to the defendants.

Providing this support was drastically different than what was needed for the people facing misdemeanors, who were generally arrested just for being out in the streets. Many of the people facing felonies were accused of breaking shit or creating Molotovs, and not everyone wants to support people who are alleged to engage in those tactics. When you're defending "vandals," it's easy to start getting into discussions of tactics and what's acceptable and what's not. The working group didn't want to get bogged down in those discussions or the good protester/bad protester dichotomy. Discussions with different groups and individuals that led to the St. Paul Principles prior to the RNC had established goodwill between them to not be divided based on those lines and bogged down by those discussions.

Additionally, the working group didn't want to vary the support they provided people based on what they were being charged with. The marketability of different people's cases wasn't an issue that divided the felony working group internally. But it is a conflict that's super relevant to us as we become increasingly criminalized if we expect to be able to motivate broader

support. It brings up questions of how to do that without denying what motivates people to take illegal actions, or without it becoming a debate about innocence or guilt.

Felony Support focused on supporting the defendants because their cases were political. It's really important for people to push the line that the best way to deal with felony charges is to treat them as political cases. Many lawyers said that approach would be the worst way to go and that it would be best not make to make them political and not to associate with other people facing felony charges because of how that could be used against them by a judge or jury. But we saw people who took that advice end up with felonies on their records. People should dispel that myth for both political and practical reasons.

Another important aspect of legal support for felony folks is ensuring they have as much info as possible. The RNC felony defendants could have benefited from having more info on their options, particularly in regards to plea agreements. This info could have affected the decisions they made about their

cases. Some people bonded out of jail before their bail hearings, which is often a waste of money. Some plead guilty without a plea agreement in place, which left it up to the prosecutors to suggest their desired sentences to the judges. This gave the defendants no leverage to negotiate the terms of their sentences and made them walk into their sentencing without knowing how bad things would be for them. So it's important to try to know as much as possible about what people are dealing with and the options available to them. Support groups for individuals can help with this too, especially if people are good at research.

Felony Support undertook the task of publicizing the addresses of those who had been imprisoned. There were several events at which people involved provided letter writing supplies, though this largely ended up being something done in more personal settings. They also compiled information and updates about cases, and publicized that as well.

Another form of legal and political support the group focused on was taking detailed court notes at some trials. Taking notes felt important to do for RNC cases since it has been

valuable in Green Scare court cases because of the implications for others that come out in court. When Brandon Darby (the FBI informant) testified, for example, it was important to capture what came out since he had so much contact with so many people.

A few people took notes as close to verbatim as possible. Then they transcribed them and tried to create a coherent narrative to put out into the world so everyone could read them. This was a huge project; it took days to transcribe the notes and put them into a narrative. People were really excited about it, thanks came in from around the nation, and some info came out during trial that was useful for folks, so it was well worth the effort. But a project of this size needs to be planned well and have enough people involved in it to carry it through so it's not started and then never completed. If people are going to take court notes, they need to realize how huge the project is and that it takes about as long to write a coherent narrative as it takes to sit in court each day. People also need to remember that it's important to number their pages, especially if they rip them out of their notebooks.

In theory, the group had a media strategy, but not in practice. People put out their own media stuff. The working group tried to be respectful of people's wishes and not publicize their names and details of their case unless given clear consent. It was definitely an uphill battle to draw positive attention and support to felony cases. Not everyone had cases that liberals could easily support. This is quite unlike the defense strategy of the RNC 8, since they are being charged with conspiracy for organizing logistics such as a meeting space and free food—tasks that aren't so contentious to be open about in the media and with liberal groups. Felony Support kept the website pretty up-to-date with information about what was going on in and out of the courtroom. A few articles were written and self-published, including an analysis of how felony cases and misdemeanor cases were interconnected.

Many people in Felony Support feel that the group really dropped the ball on supporting the people facing federal felony charges. After a while, the federal defendants (Matt DePalma, Brad Crowder, and David McKay) were the only ones still in custody, but no one in the group

really knew them and it was hard to make contact. Those folks were in a totally different system than those facing charges from Ramsey County. The group would miss federal court dates, it was hard to get in touch with the defendants, and they fell through the cracks a lot. Matt DePalma took a plea really early on before anyone even knew his case was a case. This was a wake-up call for the group and they didn't want that to happen to anyone else. After he took the plea, someone went to the federal courthouse and got a copy of it so they could put info about him out there in some way at least, but this support could have been much stronger. The group would have benefited from figuring out how to deal with the federal court system in advance because no one knew it and they had to figure it out as they went along.

The case of the Texas 2 (Brad Crowder and David McKay) was also a massive interstate clusterfuck with an informant causing all sorts of problems, people handling that in bad ways and poor communication between people all around. Felony Support had somewhat of a relationship with the folks supporting Brad and

David. The working group was in constant communication with the Austin Affinity Group and other people in Austin who were supporting the two to help publicize events in their cases, such as McKay's trial. But there were three support teams (Felony Support, the Austin Affinity Group, and other people in Austin), so it was hard to work together. The group learned that, when communicating between states and coordinating from different places, it's important to deal with the most level-headed people possible and to keep rumors to a minimum.

Much of the frustration arose from trying to identify the informant who had been a part of the Austin Affinity Group. At first, no one knew for sure who the informant was and the only ones who could figure it out were the folks in Texas. Felony Support had gone through all the court documents and they showed that there was an informant who would be easy to identify based on the documented conversations. Different folks from Texas came up for in-person meetings in the Twin Cities and said the informant should be outed, but the people who were in the position to identify the informant and make that knowledge public did

not do so for four months. There was a lot of hesitation because people didn't want to ruin someone's life or be mean without the "smoking gun" to prove that the person was an informant. Both Brad and David had told some people in Austin within the first month of being in jail that Brandon Darby was the informant, but the people who could out him didn't want to ruin his life by saying that if it weren't true.

This is similar to what's been said about other informants and has helped them continue hurting people in the past. The situation was extremely frustrating because some people involved in Felony Support felt they couldn't move forward in supporting Brad and David as well as responding to the presence of an informant until the informant had been identified. There was also tension within the group due to different opinions about the group's approach to asking the Texas folks to out the informant.

Felony Support did a number of things well but also learned a lot of important lessons along the way. Talking about felony support before the RNC and having a plan

for supporting people would have been a better approach to providing support for felony defendants. There could have been a couple people dedicated to tracking felonies from the beginning. People didn't expect a

couple dozen felonies to come from the RNC, so they were unprepared. But that can't be an excuse in the future because it's already happened here and should be expected in general.

Omnibus

A number of CRASS working groups evolved, changed, and even merged since when they were originally envisioned. There were a bunch of reasons for this, including both the strategic (participants were working on things so closely related that they didn't justify or necessitate separate working groups) and the practical (not enough folks to keep separate efforts going, individuals bottomlining particular groups didn't have enough time or vanished, etc.). We tried to incorporate these lessons as we moved ahead. It was one of the strengths of CRASS's structure that we were able to identify these things, discuss them, consense on the best way to deal with them, and adapt.

The "Omnibus" group, as it came to be known, is probably the best example of this mid-stream adaptation. Originally, CRASS had a Pressure Working Group, focused on the mainstream political/judicial side of things (i.e., showing up to disrupt or at least make some noise at campaign events for politicians and prosecutors involved in the RNC, staging call-in days to their offices demanding charges be dropped, etc.); an Outreach Working Group, focused on keeping arrestees in the loop and on coalition-building to

bring in new voices; and a Media Working Group, handling press releases, responding to any discussion of RNC arrests in the mainstream and independent press, doing interviews, writing op-eds and letters to the editor, and so forth.

It became apparent that these separate groups were really all involved in different aspects of a single effort to court allies, call state representatives on their bullshit, and try to influence public discourse. In addition, individuals

who comprised some of the original groups dropped out for various reasons of their own, which only underscored the point that these efforts should be handled by a single working group of folks interested in this kind of stuff more generally. Thus, the inelegantly named "Omnibus" group was born.

Outreach

Outreach efforts were of two types: reaching out to other stakeholders in the community to widen our efforts and outreach to arrestees themselves to let them know that this support structure existed, that travel funds were available, and that we had their backs.

The outreach efforts to other community groups pretty much stalled in the face of all the other work. Aside from the outreach aspect of media and pressure campaigns, we didn't really bring in too many other groups. At the same time, CRASS was a coalition and different voices were already present. Our ambitions to put together some sort of more broad-based coalition outside of initial contributors didn't really happen, though. We own that. In retrospect, you would benefit greatly from a separate group,

comprised of folks who really want to do traditional community organizing, to bring new people and organizations to the table.

However, our outreach to arrestees was fairly robust. We made a ton of outcalls to every arrestee we could contact and sent out a regular newsletter with updates and important info.

"Outcalls" are phone calls to arrestees to make sure they've heard about the solidarity organizing and know how to get involved and connected with other folks. The court system is designed to isolate and intimidate people, which is what makes the solidarity work so important. But people who aren't already part of the movement and connected to the community may not know that alternatives to braving it alone exist. That's why these calls are so important.

We found it important and useful to call people to check in a couple times. We scheduled a few days to get lots of people in the office to make calls together and then worked our way down the list until we contacted everyone who gave us contact info. During these calls, we

asked them how they were doing, if they had heard about the court solidarity strategy we were organizing (including the travel fund to help them come back to fight their charges), and what kind of support they wanted. We also asked for an update on their case since they may have had information that we didn't. Some things we asked: Have their charges been dropped? Do they need money to travel back for court? Do they need a place to stay when they get here? Has their public defender/lawyer been in touch with them? Most of all, we let people know that we were still there for them and that they could call us any time they had a question or news to share.

We had one round of outcalls a couple months after the RNC, when a ton of people were making their way through court and hundreds were still waiting to find out whether they would be prosecuted or not. We found that this was well timed, since so many people were anxious about not knowing what would happen to them but didn't know what to do about it. About a year after the RNC, we did another round of outcalls to connect with folks

about civil litigation opportunities, which also worked well since so many people were anxious to sue the bastards who arrested them for daring to be out in public during those days.

On a related note, several folks bottomlined a newsletter called the RNC800. While not technically a product of Omnibus, it ties in with the larger effort. The RNC800 provided information to our email list about ongoing trials, call-outs for court and prisoner support, details about upcoming demonstrations, reportbacks on events that had transpired, etc. This was another helpful way to keep folks plugged in to solidarity efforts even if they had traveled back to homes outside of the Twin Cities. This was sent out on a pretty solidly weekly basis until most of the cases had been resolved and there was simply less to report, at which point we drafted one as needed.

Media

There was significant disagreement, at least initially, within the Omnibus group about the degree to which mainstream media should be courted or engaged. Basically, some folks felt that efforts should be

made to get our voices into the mainstream coverage and to counter, even if only a bit, the gross misrepresentations we'd seen and knew were coming. Some other folks felt that this was simply a waste of time, that the deck was so utterly stacked that no matter what we said or did, the mainstream media would do their standard thing. This is probably not a debate that's going away any time soon. In CRASS, we struck something of a balance (or tried to): We wrote our professional-ish media advisories and press releases, we responded to articles with letters to the editor, we submitted op-eds, and we agreed to laugh about all of it. When some of them actually got printed, so much the better; when they didn't, we shrugged. "Fucking typical," was the vibe, "but may as well try to kick them when we can." You'll have to figure out for yourself how much energy to expend on that type of thing.

One thing that was definitely beneficial was compiling a decent media list. We had the luxury of comrades who had worked within the standard nonprofit world and had access to that kind of extensive and already completed work, which

was promptly liberated. We recommend this highly. Finding out who works where, if they're still employed (always questionable with print media these days), how to reach them ... this is long and laborious work better left to your friends who get paid by reformists to do it. They almost certainly will be happy to see it put to other, better uses.

There are plenty of resources on how to write media advisories and press releases, so we'll mostly leave that alone here. It basically goes: (1) Something interesting happened/is about to happen!; (2) You should be interested in it and here's why!; (3) Here's some background on why you should've been interested already if you were sharp enough to have been paying attention!; (4) Here's a quote from someone interesting about it!; (5) Propaganda! That's pretty much it. Log in to your media e-mail account (separate from any other organizational e-mails), bcc your liberated media list, hit send. Don't be surprised when nothing happens. We got some attention occasionally, not all of it bad. Here's hoping for you.

One other note on releases and

advisories: You'll need to include contact information for someone (or multiple people) from your group, so that interested parties can get in touch. We had several folks in the Omnibus group who were willing to do this, so we switched between them from release to release. This is nice because it divvies up the labor and allows for multiple voices. In retrospect, though, we really wish we'd invested in a media cell phone separate from our individual personal phones. It's not something we gave a lot of thought to at the time, but you'd be well-advised to consider it if you have the funds. For one thing, several of us (and our cell phone numbers) can now easily be found online, which isn't all that awesome. For another thing, reporters will sometimes keep your info on file in case something comes up in the future and they need a contact person, even months down the road when you might have dropped out for some reason, taken an extended vacation, or whatever. For us, it would've made a lot more sense to have a dedicated line that could've been passed off to whoever was willing to staff it temporarily. It goes without saying that you

should coordinate with your local Indymedia folks (they really should already be involved at this point), post everything to social networking and radical news sites, and so forth. CRASS also set up and maintained a really basic blog-style website (www.RNCAftermath.org), where we'd post the latest news, text of press releases, links to other relevant sources of info, and details about upcoming events.

We received interest from the New York Times, CNN, al-Jazeera, and some other similar names. We got in the local papers a lot. This might not seem to matter, but it raised awareness of our point of view, maybe brought in some money to funnel to commissary funds, travel expenses, and other stuff, and perhaps made someone somewhere stop and think.

Pressure

The pressure campaign was the fun part of Omnibus.

While most of CRASS's work focused on the critical aspects of mutual aid, enabling folks to fight their charges and know they were supported, there was also the simple fact that this shit just

should not stand, that these fuckers who made it possible should be held accountable in some fashion. So, we fucked with them.

For instance, Chris Coleman, the Mayor of St. Paul, holds an annual sledding party around the holidays, where constituents are encouraged to come out, meet the mayor, have some good family fun. We took him up on his offer, got our family together, and set out. We brought

with us signs that showed Santa Claus in a gas mask, sang revised Christmas carols with lyrics emphasizing his complicity in the police riot and the suppression of civil liberties, and sledded the fuck out of that hill. It was popular with the children in attendance (ourselves included), less so with the adults. The mayor slinked off early.

When Ramsey County Sheriff Bob Fletcher held a fundraiser at a local



Projectile Shells (to the tune of Jingle Bells, more or less)

*Dashing through the town
In an unmarked cavalcade
O'er the crowds we go
Spraying all the way.
Clubs on masked heads ring
Making spirits bright
What fun it is to gas and Tas
Some anarchists tonight.
Oh, projectile shells, projectile shells,
Projectiles all the way.
Oh what fun it is to bomb
From an unmarked cavalcade.
Projectile shells, projectile shells,
Projectiles all the way.
Oh what fun it is to bomb
From an unmarked cavalcade.*

Coleman, the Facist Mayor (to the tune of Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer)

*Coleman, the Facist mayor
Had a very shady role
And if you ever saw it
You would even say it blows.
All of the other mayors
Used to laugh and call him names
They never let poor Coleman
Bomb people and go insane.
Then one muggy Labor Day,
McCain came to say:
"Coleman with your guns so bright,
Won't you bomb your town tonight?"
Then all the mayors loved him
As they shouted out in glee,
"Coleman the Facist mayor,
You'll go down in infamy."*

Republican stronghold (a sports bar, actually, but you get the point), we printed up special edition currency to donate.

Attendance required a mandatory \$100 donation, which we didn't have access to, but we did have access to a free copier, so we mocked what we called "Bob Bucks" and tried to gain admittance. After being forcibly ejected from the event (as one young staffer informed us, "This is not actually money"), we distributed them to all incoming and outgoing attendees, stuck them

under all windshield wipers in the area, handed them to passersby and stopped cars, and then held a dance party on the sidewalk with a mobile sound system. They closed all the blinds so they couldn't dig our awesomeness, but it was pretty clear that ours was the better party of the two.

In less dramatic fashion, we also staged call-in days to the prosecutor's office demanding charges be dropped, joined other supporters of the RNC 8 at events targeting Ramsey County Attorney



"This is not actually money."

Susan Gaertner (who was running for governor until shortly before the time of this writing), showed up in smaller numbers at Q&A events for various candidates with RNC ties, and generally tried to remind them (and everyone else) that we weren't going away.

We think that message was consistently conveyed and regularly received, and it certainly helped keep the injustices of the RNC in the public mind longer than those in power would've wished. Our combined efforts made tear gas and mass arrest synonymous with a lot

of these folks, and played a role in terminally damaging a few campaigns (for example, Susan Gaertner's bid for governor).

And, certainly not least of all, it provided an opportunity to get out and make some noise. When dealing with all of the details and sometimes suffocating legal work involved with our efforts more generally, this shouldn't be discounted. Sometimes, it's good for the individual and collective spirit to just roll up and shame these assholes. Highly recommended!

Civil Litigation

The Civil Litigation Working Group formed around the beginning of 2009 to help people adversely affected by the actions of cops and government officials win compensation for their injuries and civil rights violations. This group formed later than the rest partly due to capacity constraints and partly because it's generally best to wait for criminal cases to be resolved before people file civil suits. In Minnesota, the statute of limitations for filing civil suits is two years when filing against city cops and three years when filing against sheriffs, so we had plenty of time to deal with other shit before focusing on civil litigation. Even if the court system isn't designed to make civil litigation hard or impossible while criminal charges are outstanding, as is the case in Minnesota, the reality is that prosecutors often jack up the charges people are facing or refuse to negotiate plea agreements with people who have filed suit or have publicly stated that they intend to file suit. Some people who were arrested during the RNC but never charged, or who had their charges dropped, were slapped with charges after submitting notices of claim (which are documents that say that you might file a law suit, but aren't law suits themselves).

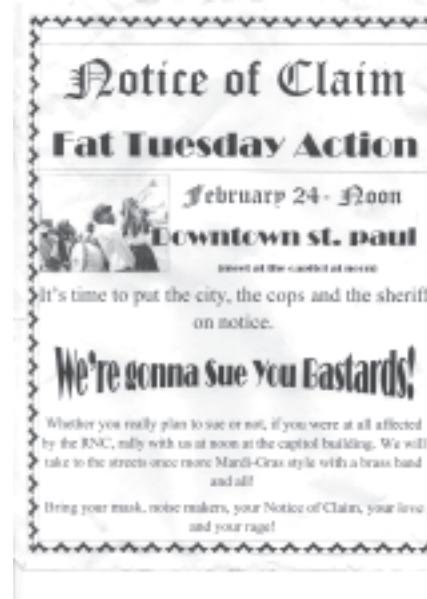
As with other large National Security Special Events (NSSEs) in recent years, the Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul were covered by an insurance policy to pay for claims of police brutality and civil rights violations. For this RNC, the policy was for up to \$10 million. The insurance policy was orchestrated by the Republican National Committee, which hosted the convention. Clearly, the cities and the Republican Party at large were planning on doing whatever they wanted to people in the streets and paying for it later in the most cost-effective way possible.

The first steps this group took were to start educating people about their options for filing suit and the state laws affecting any potential suits. In Minnesota, a precursor to filing a civil suit is filing a notice of claim with the person or agency you think you will sue to hold accountable for the wrongs done to you. We couldn't determine how much this was a formality and how much it was a necessity since the cops and cities obviously knew that they had arrested and brutalized people, thereby making it unlikely that they would be able to successfully argue in court that they didn't know about the alleged

wrong, weren't notified about it, and thus shouldn't be sued for it. But filing notices of claim served the purpose of preserving people's rights to sue, at least to the extent of cutting off one more excuse the state could try in court to weasel their way out of being held accountable.

Notices of claim in Minnesota are due within six months of the alleged incident, which just so happened to fall on Mardi Gras for the people detained and searched in the Convergence Space on the Friday before the convention. Realizing the importance of making a drive for submitting legal forms more interesting, CRASS organized a Mardi Gras parade of notice of claim forms, complete with masks, costumes, noise makers, and speeches outside the courthouse in downtown St. Paul before a lawyer took the forms inside and submitted them. The streets rang with our chants of "1/2/3/4/We won't take it anymore/5/6/7/8/Sue the city, sue the state!" and other such things that helped us create an attention-grabbing scene that showed up on all the local news later.

The parade was a great time on a beautiful day in February (not that common this far north!). We had several dozen people there, which was good for a lunchtime on a



Tuesday. And we got some good media coverage, both independent and corporate. One of the best things to come from our efforts to file lots of notices en masse was one organizer within CRASS overhearing one of the main city attorneys for St. Paul complaining about how horrible it was that so many lawsuits could be coming their way.

A lot of work went into building up to the Mardi Gras parade. In addition to the usual event

planning tasks, we had to educate ourselves about the process and work closely with several lawyers to make sure we were getting our facts and the legal process straight (or as straight as possible, since the lawyers didn't always know all the answers). We compiled a long FAQ on our website, produced a pamphlet about civil litigation (see Appendix), and coordinated several civil litigation training workshops to educate people and hand out copies of the notice of claim forms.

Since so many police agencies were involved in brutalizing and repressing people during the RNC, many people submitted notices to the City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County Sheriff's Department, City of St. Paul, Ramsey County Sheriff's Department, and City of Bloomington (south of Minneapolis, also in Hennepin County). As a result, we had dozens of individual notices of claim with even more copies being delivered in total. In addition to collecting forms from people to deliver en masse at the end of the parade, both from people in town and from people who mailed them in from all over the country, people mailed forms into the agencies directly.

I was working with CRASS throughout the year following the RNC to support the motherfucking resistance, right, and I had a short-lived job at a pizza joint in downtown St. Paul which was located hella close to the courthouse/city hall.

One day, city attorney/one of the head RNC case prosecutors John Choi comes in & begins complaining to a colleague, "Oh my God! Our office is SWAMPED, we are like totally paralyzed w/ all these RNC lawsuits filed against us." This was in reference to CRASS's huge action filing notices of claim (w/ intent to sue & damages).

He looked pretty upset and defeated, and continued to lament our ceaseless offensives and widespread community support. He had won only one RNC case out of hundreds at that point, & pretty much looked like an irresponsible alarmist wasting the city's \$.

After the forms were submitted, this working group's work level died down for a bit. Six months had passed since the RNC, but there was still plenty of time to organize lawsuits, both individual claims and group suits that could have the potential to become class action lawsuits. Over the next several months, we worked with lawyers to review the notices that had been filed and kept in touch

with the people who had filed notices to assure them that we hadn't forgotten about them or disappeared.

We also worked to recruit lawyers to focus on particular mass arrests and other significant events. Eventually, some lawyers stepped forward who were interested in filing lawsuits for the mass arrest on Shepard Road on September 1,

2008 (around 200 people were rounded up in a park by the river, surrounded by cops, and arrested en masse without being given any dispersal orders or ability to leave). Using the network we had built through the course of our work, we put out a call for people to get involved in a group claim. Exactly one year to the day of the mass arrest, the lawyers announced the filing of a lawsuit with around two dozen named plaintiffs (the people dedicated to going to court and sharing their stories to fight back against the repression they experienced). The lawyers and several of the plaintiffs held a press conference at the park, which received quite a bit of attention. At the time of this writing, the petition to turn the lawsuit into a class action lawsuit is still pending.

This lawsuit came together fairly easily and didn't require much effort from CRASS beyond the notice of claim work and putting out a call for plaintiffs. Several individuals also hired lawyers to file individual claims for them, so CRASS wasn't involved in those suits either. But another suit that was worked on took quite a bit of effort from CRASS. This suit aimed to focus on the last day of

the convention, when the cops blocked a march organized by the Anti-War Committee from going to the Xcel Center to protest the convention. In the early evening, the cops isolated and arrested many of the AWC organizers. As night fell, they fired chemical weapons and flash-bang (concussion) grenades at people, giving them contradictory dispersal orders that made them move into harm's way. Eventually, the cops herded more than 300 people onto the Marion Street Bridge and arrested them all.

At first, no lawyers stepped forward to start talking with potential plaintiffs about the possibility of filing suit. Eventually, one did, so we started reaching out to folks who had been arrested that day to see who was still interested in filing suit. We searched through the Coldsnap arrestee database to identify everyone we knew of who had been arrested, organized a calling day, and started setting up interviews with people to hear their stories. Prior to conducting the interviews, we worked with the lawyer to create questionnaires to explore the aspects of their experiences that could have bearing on a civil suit, such as whether

they were arrested and what their interactions with cops were like on that day (e.g., were they beaten, gassed, etc.).

We started interviewing people in the Twin Cities with the goal of interviewing a sufficient sample of the people who had been arrested so the lawyer could review their experiences to identify possible legal claims that could be made. These interviews took about 45 minutes each and we generally had two interviewers present, one to ask questions and the other to take notes. Next, we scheduled phone interviews with people who lived elsewhere. Although conducting the interviews was easy, scheduling them tended to be difficult and frustrating, as many people didn't show up or asked to be rescheduled but never followed up on setting up another time.

We also started reviewing the evidence available to us from the National Lawyers Guild evidence collection, the closed-circuit camera footage acquired from the City of St. Paul through a Minnesota Data Practices Act request, and police reports and other records acquired from St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Bloomington through more Data

Practices Act requests. Reviewing this evidence has been a daunting task, both because of the amount of information to review and several agencies making excuses for why they don't have the data we requested or shouldn't have to give it to us.

The pace of civil litigation can be frustrating, as suits can take several years to get underway and many, many more to be resolved. One difficulty in this is keeping up political support for the suits after a lot of time has passed and people have focused their organizing energy on other projects. Another is keeping the suits in the minds of the activist community, general public, and media since so much time passes between significant events in the lifetime of a suit. Also, pursuing civil litigation can be a problematic political exercise since it has the potential to compensate people for the wrongs they suffered but remain an individualistic endeavor rather than a movement-building one. It also requires a lot of time and energy to be put into organizing that is strictly defensive and reactive rather than creating alternatives that can challenge and destroy the existing systems.

Nevertheless, the system we live in recognizes the transfer of money as a way of enacting justice, so it can be a worthwhile political endeavor, however reformist it remains.

Overall, we have done some good work to provide political support for civil litigation coming from the RNC, as seen by the community and media response we got from the Mardi Gras parade. Our work has been largely hidden from

community and media view since the press conference on September 1, 2009, however. If a large lawsuit from the last day of the convention is pulled together in the future, there will be more opportunity to revive the political support and create some noise about this work. In this sense, this part of CRASS's work may not be done for many years to come.

Zine-Archive Working Group

Well, what the hell? You're reading this, aren't you?

In all seriousness, the eventual compilation and production of this zine was a stated goal from the very beginnings of CRASS, and what became the zine working group was one of the very first groups proposed. A priority was made from the start to document and archive not only the actions we've taken and the work we've done, but also the ideas and philosophies that underpinned that work and made the whole thing tick. We hope it shows.

The group of people who are presently putting this together is almost an entirely different group from that which began this project

in late 2008. The fact is, most of us were so consumed with the work of CRASS—to say nothing of our other, individual projects and lives—that it simply wasn't realistic to sit down and reflect on the scope of our efforts until much, much later. What's more, a lot of the archiving this group was originally slated to do was ably accomplished by comrades (see the RNC08 Report, for example), and at least some of the reflective work occurred as a more practical matter through anti-oppression workshops and visioning exercises. Still, we all felt it would be of value to try and put this thing together in a (sorta) cohesive whole.

"I'll be damned, we did it."

--Zinester X

Needless to say, this job has taken a hell of a lot longer than anyone expected, and, like pretty much all of our work to date, it's partial, both intentional and occasionally haphazard, both drawn from experiences/convictions and invented along the way. There's undoubtedly a more efficient (and probably coherent) way to do this, but we don't know it, and at this point we really just want to kick this thing out the door in the hopes that it might be useful to someone, somewhere.



Back row: Zinester X, Zinester X, Zinester X

Front row: Zinester X, Zinester X, Zinester X, Zinester X

The vast bulk of this work has been done (or not done) by the people who lived it, and we've no doubt overemphasized some pieces and left more than a few gaps obvious to readers who are not us. There's not much to be done about that. Our suggestions are all exactly that...suggestions, based on our limited experiences. But those of us who've done most of the writing here wish we'd had something like this on the front end, so we offer it to you in that spirit. We know damn well that our adversaries learn, and learn well, and know how to pass that knowledge on and build upon it,

generation on generation. We must do the same or we have lost. We shouldn't have to, and can't afford to, reinvent the wheel every time the gas masks come out.

Other Rad Shit We Did

Thank You Cards

As Coldsnap was organizing legal support prior to the RNC and CRASS was forming, we had a ton of support from folks from all over the country. In particular, we had help from Midnight Special Law Collective, as many of their collective members stayed in town for many weeks prior to and after the convention. Folks from DC Justice and Solidarity also helped out tremendously. After the RNC, we got a ton of support from people across the nation who donated to our legal support fund. As a small gesture of thanks for all the love and solidarity we received, we spent a day making thank you cards for everyone who helped us and donated to the support fund. With only construction paper, pens, markers, glue, glitter, and other such fun things in conjunction with our varying degrees of artistic prowess, we created cute little cards to show our love and appreciation. And they worked! People really appreciated them. We even heard from some Midnight Special folks that those were the first thank you cards they had received in 10 years of going around the country helping people organize legal support. Not too shabby!

Indymedia: transcribing trials, getting/processing footage from the city

Like other communities over the last decade, we found that working with our Indymedia comrades was invaluable during the aftermath of the RNC. When we staged rallies, press releases, disruptions of local politicians' fundraisers, or whatever, they were there with us. Several of them stayed engaged with the court solidarity organizing efforts for many months, which helped us work with them effectively and convey the stories that were important for us to get out into the world.

During the 2004 RNC in New

York City, 400 people had their cases dismissed due to video

footage collected and indexed from independent videographers from a single organization: I-Witness

Video.

That kind of success brings unwanted attention. The first two of I-Witness Video's three separate residences/offices during the RNC

were raided by police. The first raid was on August 30th for "weapons" that did not exist and the second was on September 3rd for "hostages" that did not exist.

While no arrests were made, these traumatic incidents caused much disruption to their work. During the first raid, I-Witness Video members were handcuffed for a couple of hours.

Glassbead Collective, Twin Cities Indymedia, I-Witness, and Minneapolis-based Communities United Against Police Brutality (CUAPB) later came together to collect independent and official footage for the legal defense teams. Some of the independent material had already been used in an

independent documentary released two months after the Convention, "Terrorizing Dissent" (<http://www.terrorizingdissent.org>)

Several local media sources reported that the cops themselves had collected more than 6,000 hours of video in downtown Saint Paul during the RNC from a newly installed network of over 50 CCTV security cameras and from dozens of hand-held police video cameras. Before the RNC, the public was told that St. Paul's CCTV footage would be available "live on the Internet" during the Convention. This never happened. With criminal cases ongoing in the aftermath, there was a need for defense attorneys to get hold of it as soon as possible. The police were determined to keep it away from us as long as possible.

According to the local chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, the City of St. Paul stated that they may not release the tapes for another two or three years so they could be reviewed to protect

the identities of undercover officers.

There was nothing in any statutes that said that the RNC security camera footage required police review. Yet the police had essentially stated that they would sit on the tapes for years until all the RNC trials were concluded. Ultimately, St. Paul City Attorney John Choi was reported as saying that "all the video would be disclosed to defense attorneys as required by the rules of criminal procedure and court orders."

CUAPB had filed Minnesota Data Practice Act requests for this footage as early as September 13th, 2008. A team of local activists, lawyers, and Twin Cities Indymedia volunteers came together to follow up this request to the bitter end. There was a lot of official denial about the tapes. St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman claimed that all CCTV footage "has been turned over to defense counsel" in a January 7th letter. This was patently false. Beginning on January 6th, 2009, CUAPB was only able to inspect the CCTV files for the first time on an often unavailable or offline viewing station in an intimidating police

station lobby. The first time anyone was even able to browse the files, CUAPB immediately determined that some camera names didn't appear in the so-called "master list," and some footage from others that appeared in the list had been put in the trash bin (but not yet emptied!).

CUAPB jumped through numerous hoops over the next several months. They had to fight ridiculous data-processing charges that the police attempted to levy. CUAPB had to provide sealed, brand new hard drives so the police computer systems would not be "threatened by computer viruses."

The footage was only ultimately released to the organization on April 29th, almost eight months after the RNC. Some of the footage CUAPB cataloged from the list in the police viewing station terminal was missing from the returned hard drives. There was no footage from hand-held cameras. But they were able to get the footage hiding in the trash bin.

It had been a long journey dealing with the city's outrageous bureaucracy. For some arrestees, it was too late. But the footage pried



out of the fingers of the city was successfully used in some criminal defense cases and will likely continue to be used for civil litigation purposes over the next few years. We only got to the end of that long road thanks to the persistence of local lawyers, activists, and Twin Cities Indymedia volunteers working with CUAPB to pressure city and police officials to give up the footage.

The RNC '08 Report has an archive on the CCTV saga at <http://rnc08report.org/cctv/>

Another rad thing we did in conjunction with Indymedia was to post transcripts of RNC trials. Folks from the Felony Support Working Group and Indymedia worked together to take laborious

hand-written notes of trials, day after painful day of tedious court proceedings. They then transcribed the notes and posted them online for all the world to see. Although the court proceedings were all open to the public, and therefore the transcripts were accessible through the state, taking our own notes allowed us to make connections and analyze what the judge and prosecutor were saying in ways that the corporate media and court reporters weren't able or willing to do. We were also able to show other arrestees what the trial process could look like, which did one more thing to demystify the system that banks so much on keeping people in the dark about what is going to happen to them in those "hallowed chambers."

Prisoner Support: Commissary Funds, Letters, Visits

Prisoner support is another incredibly important aspect of post-event solidarity. Although in an ideal world there would be no need to have a prisoner-support structure, we're involved in this work because we don't live in an ideal world. Supporting the people who have been held hostage by the state is one of the most important things we can do. In our case, we made sure to create a commissary fund and application process so that people serving time--whether a few weeks or a few years--would have access to money to help them make their incarcerations slightly more comfortable, all things considered. Commissary funds are an important aspect of prisoner support, as prisons systematically deprive people of both basic comforts as well as bare necessities such as underwear and toothbrushes.

Our system for commissary funds was pretty simple--everyone being held hostage was eligible, regardless of whether they were convicted at trial or took a plea deal. We gave out funds in \$50 increments upon request either by the people being held hostage or by their allies (since prisoners also have to buy paper and stamps with commissary funds). We chose \$50 increments because we wanted to ensure that we could give out money as equally as possible for as long as possible considering the other requests being made of our funds (e.g., travel expenses). This amount was also estimated to be a sufficient increment to help prisoners for a while by one of the federal inmates.

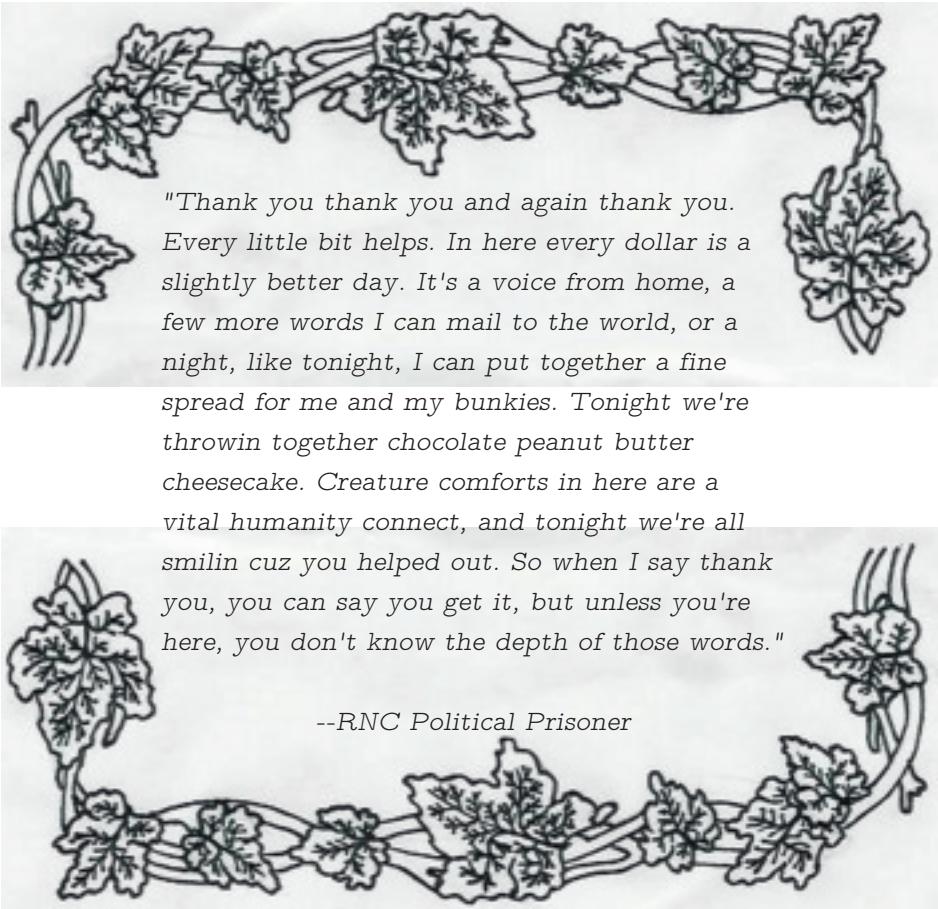
We also helped coordinate letter writing sessions for people to write prisoners, as well as visits to those being held in facilities close to the Twin Cities. Most of the activities that we organized as a group were in conjunction with the work being done by the support committees of particular prisoners (e.g., the committees for Jesse James Forrey, the Texas 2, etc.). We also worked with the Arise! Books and Resources Collective, an infoshop in Minneapolis, to host regular letter-writing nights for political

prisoners from around the nation, including RNC prisoners.

Unfortunately, these sessions didn't last too long because of capacity constraints faced by the people organizing the sessions and the low turn out at them. This is a shame since writing to political prisoners is an important part of building and sustaining movements for social justice--one that is too often overlooked or pushed off until later!

Overall, though, the majority of our efforts in this area were based on individual initiative and the relationships that developed from that. In some ways, this result was fine, as our comrades inside the prison walls were appreciative of the friendships they built despite the state's efforts to separate them from their communities and allies.

In other ways, though, we could have done a much better job of helping to create a culture of prisoner support. It has often been said that a movement is only as strong as its prisoner support, and our experiences show that this is true. In particular, the people arrested on Federal charges (David McKay and Brad Crowder [the Texas 2], Matt DePalma), were



"Thank you thank you and again thank you. Every little bit helps. In here every dollar is a slightly better day. It's a voice from home, a few more words I can mail to the world, or a night, like tonight, I can put together a fine spread for me and my bunkies. Tonight we're throwin together chocolate peanut butter cheesecake. Creature comforts in here are a vital humanity connect, and tonight we're all smilin cuz you helped out. So when I say thank you, you can say you get it, but unless you're here, you don't know the depth of those words."

--RNC Political Prisoner

immediately cut off from other arrestees and the community at large by being transferred from the Ramsey County Jail, where other people were being held, to state penitentiaries. These individuals also did not have strong ties to the local community, as they came from different cities. Only through the persistent efforts of our Felony Support and Courtwatch Working Groups did we make contact with them and keep it throughout their

trials and (ongoing) incarcerations. Had these folks on the outside not been dedicated to ensuring that the folks on the inside facing serious charges weren't left all alone, they could have served their time in relative anonymity and isolation. Providing solidarity by reaching out to those under the state's control is the least that those of us who haven't yet been incarcerated can do. After all, we could be next.

Acquiring Official Documents

The RNC was designated a National Special Security Event (NSSE) by the federal government. The government eventually produced a massive number of leaked and non-leaked documents...aka "official" yet not independent reports. After all, with a \$50 million dollar security budget, the bureaucrats had to justify it with thousands of pages detailing their own plans for the funds, the riot cops, their intelligence strategies and all the details, often times mundane but sometimes revealing, that went into their planning in the years before the convention.

There were two major categories of documents: leaked documents and "public" reports. Leaked documents are documents that were "accidentally" or purposively leaked to the public via various means such as websites, materials left over by a conference, etc.

Public reports are readily available and released by the local authorities. These documents are often very white-washed and rarely contain much value other than to gloss over any official mistakes and sometimes leave some interesting clues in their exhibits.

Before, during, and after the convention, many security and internal documents were leaked and placed on prominent websites such as Cryptome.org and Wikileaks.org, a clearing house that allows whistleblowers and others the ability to expose corporate and

government documents to the public. These types of documents would generally require filing formal data practice or FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) requests and, depending on the agency, may be received months later with all sorts of standard redactions, making them difficult to understand except for those with some legal knowledge of how to work that system. Obviously, when these documents are released in an unauthorized and timely manner, it can save activists and independent journalists a lot of effort and time.

For example, one such document leaked after the convention was a slide show given by the Homeland Security and Federal Emergency Management Agency in Minnesota. Wikileaks had the document posted by mid-November, a few months after the convention, but it

still provided some valuable insight with regard to the players and procedures involved in setting up an NSSE. While the document contained a lot of information that was already known to the public, it included a chart showing the prominent involvement of military and the Department of Defense Northern Command (aka NORTHCOM) that even raised the eyebrows of the local ACLU chapter. Though this may sometimes seem like common knowledge—especially amongst aware activists who may have witnessed similar activities at protests—any document that can provide a factual basis will help bring in support and sympathy from more groups and individuals, as well as possible evidence for any civil litigation that involves government wrongdoing.

And speaking of illegal spying, one of the most revealing of the leaked government documents was a highway watch report, published in March of 2008 before the Convention, and leaked on all the usual websites. This article, deemed "Law Enforcement Sensitive," discussed in striking detail what type of intelligence Homeland Security was conducting on local

activist groups at that time. Besides the RNC Welcoming Committee's website, the document indicated that the government was tracking other groups including WAMM (Women Against Military Madness), the Anti-War Committee, and Recreate 68 in a coordinated effort to squash any dissent by all possible groups involved at the RNC and DNC that year.

The highway watch report also indicated that homeland security has no sense of humor, as they took one satirical press release about the Welcoming Committee obtaining tasers as an actual threat indicating that the group may be raising funds to buy a large number of these devices. Ha ha. Sort of.

The city of Minneapolis failed to authorize an “official” report for the 100+ arrests in their city. At least one city, St. Paul, commissioned an “independent” investigation lead by two former U.S. Attorneys, Thomas Heffelfinger and Andrew Luger. Subsequently known as the Heffelfinger/Luger report, this official report on the police and security was no different than

what most activists would expect out of a poorly funded and not very independent commission. Despite the alleged “party” differences between these two specific individuals, Heffelfinger and Luger both had a background of working on the campaign trail when Republican Heffelfinger endorsed Democrat Luger’s County Attorney race a few years earlier.

The city of St. Paul allowed the “investigators” to present this report during a closed-for-comment City Council meeting. The room was packed with city council members, police, prosecutors, the mayor, and CRASS activists who turned out in large numbers wearing newly produced CRASS t-shirts. In addition, some decided to place duct tape over their mouths to protest being silenced and not allowed to comment on the outrageous claims made in the report. Not surprisingly, and duct tape notwithstanding, those

claims resulted in many jeers and boos during the presentation as one public official after another blamed “anarchists” for the violence on the streets and ignored the many instances of police violence. While they acknowledged the troubling aspects of the arrests of dozens of journalists, the report itself was nothing more than 80-some odd pages of patting the city of St. Paul on the back. In fact, the term “anarchist” (or some variation thereof) was used 348 times alone in the document! They also went as far as recommending that future cities that host these types of events must indoctrinate the residents with images of riot cops and weaponry as being “okay.”

While the presentation of the final report left much to be desired for input, the city of St. Paul hosted a few public hearings before the report was drafted that gave the



The more a word was used in the Heffelfinger-Luger Report, the larger it is.

investigators a chance to hear many stories of police brutality and misconduct. In retrospect, it provided some good video as the independent media was there filming and later sharing the stories online. The room was also packed with mostly supporters and, in the immediate aftermath, allowed a lot of stories to be captured even if Heffelfinger and Luger mainly discredited them in their official report.

A few lessons we learned were:

• If the event you plan to attend or participate in is an NSSE, be aware that there likely will be local, state, federal, and military groups involved. All of these groups will likely be producing documents, conducting surveillance, etc.

• Don't be afraid to do outreach to legal organizations, but don't rely only on one "established" legal organization if your group is having problems trying to get the documents or film out in the open. For example, the local ACLU and/or NLG may be able to provide some basic help and knowledge of the request processes but all these groups have limitations in time, money and

personnel.

• Local established groups such as anti-police brutality groups may be another resource for assistance with government document discovery. For example, the fight to get the CCTV (video footage) from the downtown cameras in St. Paul was lead by activists who already had the experience in requesting local government files. They were able to review and obtain the footage to be placed on hard drives for future distribution and review for upcoming criminal and civil cases.

• Check websites like Wikileaks regularly for leaked government sources. It is surprising what might show up and any large-scale event is more than likely to result in a few leaked documents.

• Keep an eye out for any "independent investigators" (i.e., Heffelfinger/Luger) and be prepared. These reports may have some secondary value if covered by independent media sources or if a planned protest is incorporated. But, don't put any trust in these types of investigations or "after action" reports to do anything more than cover up and justify any wrong doings by those in power.

afterword: summing p u shit

So that's our zine.

Our solidarity work operated out of a fundamentally anarchist/anti-authoritarian framework. Not everyone involved in CRASS would self-identify as such, but the basic understandings, concerns, and methodologies were drawn from that approach:

1. Non-hierarchical structure: We had no leaders and all decisions were made by consensus. This meant that the participating individuals determined the direction of our efforts, all voices were accorded equal weight, and we would move forward together or not at all. This sometimes meant that louder voices had to quiet down and listen. It led to derailed discussions that forced us to focus on internal power dynamics. Well, good. It

meant that everyone involved in making decisions was invested in those decisions. Also good.

2. Community self-help: We aspired to be a ground-up organization. We existed for the purposes determined by the arrestees who comprised the group because they were we existed in the first place. CRASS was intended to be a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

3. Rejection of the "cult of expertise": It's a basic notion of anarchist/anti-authoritarian thinking that no one—not the most "educated," most vocal, most privileged—is more capable or better prepared to determine the structures of your life or the forms of your resistance than you are. No one.

Through our organizing, we tried to

build structures of respect and solidarity that may have been left aside if "professionalism" had held sway. We also strove towards forms of individual and collective empowerment that are alien to the legal process, where we are usually objects rather than agents. Because folks knew their friends had their backs, because they had a meaningful voice, because basic necessities were taken care of like travel and housing, many of us were more willing to stand and fight than we might otherwise have been.

4. Anti-oppression: When conflicts based on oppressive power structures arose, we tried to tackle them. Belatedly at times, that's true. But because of a widespread commitment to and awareness of the importance of working together in a way that challenged and worked to destroy systems of oppression, we collectively decided to take a step back to try to deal with the dynamics that gave rise to those conflicts. This was an unusual step to take for some. But it strengthened the group even as it challenged individuals. This doesn't mean it uniformly dealt with all of our shit (how could it?), but it represented a collective effort sorely lacking from many similar endeavors, and made

some of us aware of power and privilege in unexpected ways.

5. Mutual aid: CRASS was an exercise in mutual aid. We found ourselves and our friends in a pretty fucked-up situation, so we provided what we could for our friends and trusted that they would provide for us. It's really as simple as that.

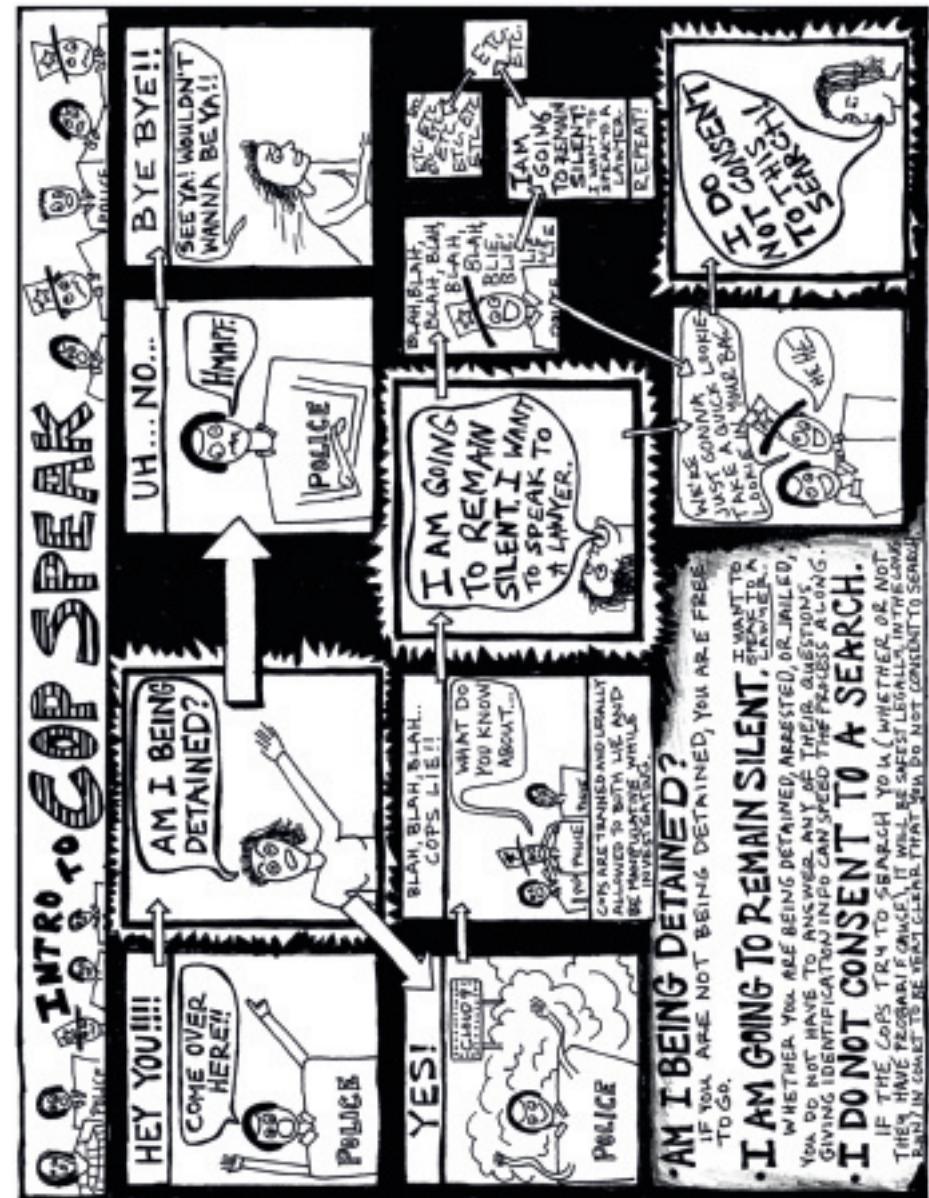
Yeah, we could've done a lot of shit better. Yeah, we could've been more on point, time and again. But where this society told us, "You're on your own," we tried to respond, "Nope, we're in this shit together." And when the courts said, "Give up, you're all by yourself," we tried to respond, "Nope, my friends have my back." And when we heard, "Do you want some help?" we tried to always reply, "Absolutely! Come join us!"

So yeah. Small triumphs, plenty of fuck ups, long meetings. Shit was alright. And we survived, many of us stronger, more hopeful, and better prepared for the next time than we began.



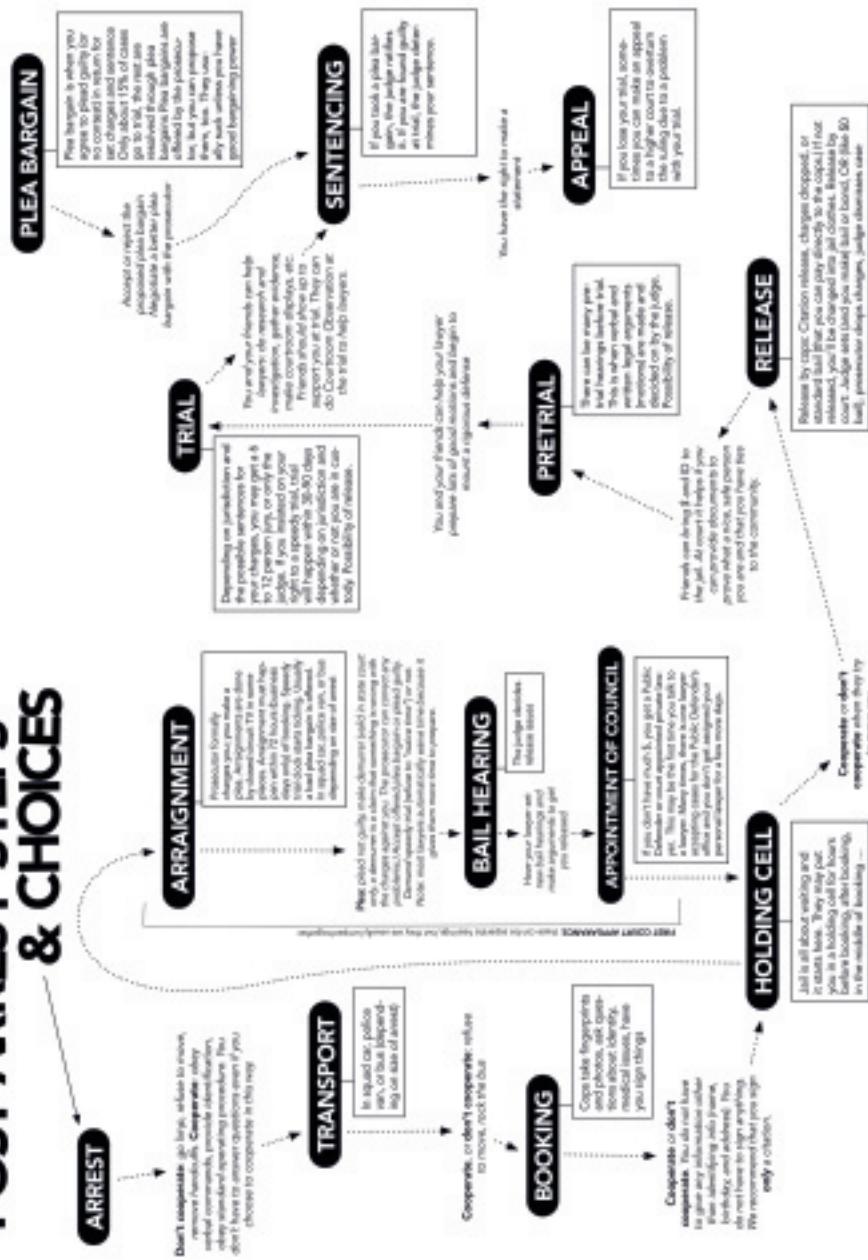
Your turn.

appendix



Much love and thanks to Paper for this awesome sketch

POST-ARREST STEPS & CHOICES



AFFINITY GROUP ARRESTEE SUPPORT FORM*

Goes to Your Legal Support Person and No One Else!

Legal support people should keep this form away from the action and in a safe place at all times! This is not privileged or protected information. It can be used by the cops if they get ahold of it.

Full legal name _____ Nickname/Alias _____
Phone _____ E-mail _____
Date of birth _____ Current address _____
Permanent address _____

The date I absolutely have to be done with the action/out of jail (if possible): _____

If I'm in jail overnight, I need you to (call my boss, water my plants, feed my dog, etc.)

Watch my back while I'm in jail because (I'm transgendered, a minor, a non-citizen, a person of color, on probation, have an outstanding warrant...): _____

If I have kids, these are my plans for taking care of them (or I need someone to): _____

Medications and doctor's phone number (prescriptions attached):

Health concerns or other special needs (medical conditions, allergies, dietary considerations, etc.)

Vehicle (car or bike), description, license plate number, insurance info, location of lens, who can drive or pick up, etc.

Legal Strategy (for example, I want to get out ASAP, will refuse to give name or pay fines, will act in solidarity with others, etc.)

I am / am not playing a support role, such as legal or medic (circle one). If so, which role?

[Fill out after arrest/release] Trial info:

Hearing type: Date:

* This form is offered as a guideline for information you may want to share with your legal support before an action. Please call the **Coldsnap Legal Collective jail support hotline at 651-356-8635** if anyone in your affinity group is arrested during an action, and share only the information from the form that you think is necessary. The legal collective will do its best to track them through the system, and will provide as much support as possible.

Provided by Coldsnap Legal Collective, 8/08

*For informational purposes only. Consult an attorney for legal advice.

Date: Time: Your name:

ARRESTEE INTAKE FORM

Page 1 of 2 – Legal Info		(*) is important		Possible duplicate? Y	
Personal		Arrest			
* First name		Arrest date/time			
* Exact last name		Location			
Nickname		Charge(s)			
* Date of birth		Arresting officer			
Gender ID		Badge #			
Phone		Incident ID#			
Email		Citation #			
Address		Witness name			
City, State, Zip		Witness phone			
Medical		Legal Strategy/Plans			
* Medical/health/ dietary needs		Needs to be out by:			
Medications and dosage/instruct.		Jail			
		Facility			
		Booking #			
Doctor name		Location			
Doctor phone		Court Dates			
Notes		Location		date	
Location		Location		date	
Outside Support		Lawyer			
*Affinity Group (AG)		Name/Agency			
(AG) support person		Phone			
Phone		Eligible for public defender?	Y	/	N
Notes					

www.coldsnaplegal.org

08/28/08

Coldsnap Legal Collective

Date: Time: Your name:

ARRESTEE INTAKE FORM

Page 2 of 2 – Other Info		(*) is important		Possible duplicate? Y	
Personal		Are they OK?			
* Name or Alias					
* Date of birth					
Gender ID					
Contacts					
Name	Relationship	Phone	When, Why to Call; Other Notes		
Special needs & things to be taken care of (kids, companion animals, etc.)					
Car or Bike on Scene? Other info?					
Support Role?		Release Property? To whom?			
Other Notes					

www.coldsnaplegal.org

08/28/08

Coldsnap Legal Collective

Arrestee Outtake Form

Privileged and Confidential - This form is privileged work product produced in anticipation of litigation and for use by criminal defense counsel.

Filling out this form will help the legal working group help arrestees organize their legal defense. You can leave any of these fields blank. The ones with stars (*) by them are most helpful for the legal working group.

Personal Info:

* Legal Name

* Preferred Name

* Phone 1

Phone 2

* Email

Street Address

City, State, Zip

* Date of Birth

Date/Time of Arrest

Location of Arrest

* Charge(s)

Arrest city

Arresting officer

Badge #

Incident ID#

* Citation #

Jail Facility

Date/Time of Release

* Court Date

Court File/Case #

Felony Charge? (Y / N)

Do you think you were the victim of police misconduct or brutality? (Y / N)

Did you fill out a police misconduct report form? (Y / N ?)

We are having two arrestee information meetings: Saturday, Sept 6th, 11am at the convergence space in Saint Paul and Sunday, Sept 14th, 4pm at Walker Church in Minneapolis. Will you be able to make one of these meetings? (Y / N)

Notes:

www.coldsnaplegal.org

Info for RNC Arrestees

We're so glad that you are out of jail! Here's some things to keep in mind regarding your cases:

- Hold on to all your jail paperwork - especially your citation!
- Think before you talk (blog, email, etc.) about any potentially illegal activities that happened around your arrest - you could get you or other folks in trouble. The same goes for posting photos and video.
- Try to make one of the arrestees meetings - see below for more info.
- We'll be setting up an announcement email list for updates - if you haven't given us your contact info, see below on how you can do that
- We're going to be organizing attorneys through the National Lawyers Guild to represent you at your arraignments

Send us your info

If you didn't fill out an outtake form when you were released, please call the jail support hotline at 651-356-8635. That way, we'll be able to keep you in the loop with updates, and organize an attorney to represent you at your arraignment.

Property Release

In general, if you had property taken from you during your booking, it should be returned to you when you are released from jail. Carefully check the inventory form that they gave you and make sure all your stuff is there. If they did not give you your property back, that means it is either being held as evidence by whichever policing agency arrested you, or that it was "lost".

If your property is classified as evidence, you should contact a lawyer to get it released. Call the legal hotline and we'll get working on it. If your property is lost, damaged, or destroyed, you have 180 days to file a claim against the county. Although most protest arrests are for minor offenses that often get reduced or dropped, in general, there can be risks of incriminating yourself by claiming property. If the property you are claiming is connected to a serious criminal investigation think twice or consult a lawyer before identifying yourself as the owner.

If a friend or comrade is not being released, they can designate someone to pick up their property for them. They will need to fill out a release form and you will need to bring two forms of ID to the Property Room to pick it up. The Ramsey County property room is open 24hours and the Hennepin County property room is open from 7am-10am and 7pm-10pm.

Arrestees Meetings

There will be two meetings for all arrestees. This will be a chance for you to talk to lawyers and organize your legal defense, as well as receive information about court solidarity plans. Bring your citation. Saturday September 6th, 11am at the convergence space, 627 Smith Ave., St. Paul Sunday September 14th, 4pm at Walker Church 3104 16th Ave S., Minneapolis

A note from the North Star Health Collective:

We know that being arrested and jailed can be a physically and/or emotionally traumatizing experience. If you need medical attention, someone to talk to, or just a quiet space to chill out, please come to the First Aid and Wellness Center at 629 Jackson Street (Sept 1-5, 9am-9pm). Our 24 hour info and emergency phone number is 800-719-6487.

RNC Sexual Violence Advocacy

A group of Twin Cities folks are offering sexual violence advocacy, resources, and support at the RNC. There will be a peer advocate at the Convergence space and the North Star Wellness Center. 24 hour crisis phone line (until Sept 5th) 651.434.2265

Questions?

Contact the Coldsnap Legal Collective via the jail support hotline (651) 356-8635, our email coldsnap@riseup.net, or check out our website at www.coldsnaplegal.org

Police Misconduct Report

Privileged and Confidential - This form is privileged work product produced in anticipation of litigation and for use by criminal defense counsel.

Note: Be as accurate and detailed as you can (and don't guess!). If you have any questions about filling out this form, contact us at 651.356.8635 or coldsnap@riseup.net

Today's Date:

Name of person filling out the form:

Email:

Phone Number:

Date, time and exact location of the incident (include cross streets as well as street address and any landmarks):

Victim 1:

Description of victim (include gender, race, age, height, weight, build, clothing, glasses, hair color/style, etc) Include name and contact information if known. Be as detailed as possible. Continue on the back of this form as needed.

Victim 2:

Description of victim. Include name and contact information if known. Be as detailed as possible:

Officer 1:

Name: Badge #: Organization: Rank: Vehicle type: Vehicle #: Officer description:

Officer 2:

Name: Badge #: Organization: Rank: Vehicle type: Vehicle #: Officer description:

Witness 1:

Phone: Address: Media Affiliation (if any): Description of witness. Be as detailed as possible.

Witness 2:

Phone: Address: Media Affiliation (if any): Description of witness. Be as detailed as possible.

Describe the incident. Include what lead up to the incident. Be as detailed as possible. Draw a diagram of the incident. Continue on the back of this form as needed.

Things to look for:

- How the police and civilians were acting (e.g. aggressive, scared)
- Why police arrived/were present
- Offensive language or hate speech (e.g. racist, sexist, homophobic) by cops
- Rude language or swearing by cops
- Searches of person, bag, car, or home, pat downs, stops, inappropriate questioning etc. and what was said
- Any violence (be specific)
- What type of physical force, what type of weapons (e.g. Shove, punch, nightstick, pepper spray)
- How many times and on what parts of the body did the officer strike
- Was victim cuffed or being held down
- Any property damaged or taken
- Injuries - describe number, type and location (e.g., two baseball-sized bruise on back)
- Info on ambulance and medics (license plate #, names and ID #s)
- Hospital where treatment was obtained

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Consensus Decision-Making Process & Security Culture Guidelines

Consensus Process

Consensus is a decision-making process that is intended to include all persons making the decision. Instead of voting for an item and having the majority of the group getting their way, the group is committed to finding solutions that everyone can live with. This way, everyone's opinions, ideas and reservations are considered. In facilitated meetings, the facilitator(s) should help the conversations along by following this process:

1. As a group, define the problem or decision needing to be made. This should be done in a way that separates the problems and questions from personalities.
2. Brainstorm possible solutions through a conversation directed by the facilitation process. This conversation should allow for questions and clarification of the situation. Make sure everybody has a chance to contribute.
3. Once a solution has been articulated, state a proposal so everybody is clear on the decision to be evaluated.
4. Ask if anyone has any clarifying questions or concerns. Facilitate the conversation so that their questions are answered and their concerns discussed. If necessary, modify the proposal and restate it.
5. Ask if there are any blocks. A block means that someone feels strongly that the group would be making a grave error by consensing on the proposal. If someone blocks the proposal, they should speak to their concerns. The facilitator(s) should then check with the group to see if the decision-making process should be tabled or started over.
6. Ask if there are any stand asides. A stand aside means that someone is not entirely comfortable with the decision or is ambivalent about it, but does not want to stop the decision from being made. If someone stands aside, they can speak to their reasons for doing so. The facilitator(s) should check with the group to see if friendly amendments should be made or if they should check for consensus.
7. Ask if there is consensus on the proposal. It's important that the consensus be strong (i.e., not an inordinate number of stand asides).

Consensus Process Hand Signals

Stacking: Raise your hand if you want to speak, and the facilitator will point to you and put you on the "stack" of speakers in order behind anyone else who raised their hand before you.

Showing agreement: To show agreement with a statement without interrupting the speaker with a verbal agreement, you can twinkle (sometimes called using metal fingers) by wiggling your fingers.



Direct response: When someone asks a question that you know the answer to, you can move your hands back and forth with your index fingers pointed out. Directly responding jumps stack, so it should only be used to answer questions people ask. If you simply disagree with a statement, raise your hand to get on stack.



Technical point: Put your hands in a "T" shape to correct a statement or fact (such as a specific date).



Point of process: Put your fingers in a triangle gesture to bring attention to a procedural issue that needs to be addressed (e.g., the conversation has gone off topic, vibe check, time check).



While checking for consensus, use the following hand signals:

Thumb up/Twinkling: Agree

Thumb down: Disagree/block

Thumb to the side: Stand aside

Security Culture Guidelines

As certain movements become more effective, government surveillance and harassment will increase; for example, the RNC Welcoming Committee had been infiltrated and monitored by several government agencies for more than a year before the RNC began. The US government has a history of targeting militant and pacifist groups alike. Security Culture is a set of practices that allows groups of people to know and assert their rights.

What not to say:

- ➔ Your or someone else's PAST or PRESENT involvement in an underground group or illegal actions (this could include certain types of civil disobedience).
- ➔ Your FUTURE desire/plans to participate in such groups and illegal activities, or advocacy of such actions.
- ➔ Rumors or speculation about SPECIFIC INDIVIDUALS' involvement in certain illegal actions or groups.

It is perfectly fine to speak about direct action in *general terms*; it is legal and secure to speak out in support of all forms of resistance. *The danger lies in linking individual activists with specific actions or groups.*

Since our specific movement has been under intense surveillance, we should never allow a breach of security to occur without acting to correct it. If an acquaintance of yours is spreading security-compromising gossip, it is your responsibility to explain to them why that sort of speech jeopardizes the security of particular individuals, and the group as a whole, and is thus inappropriate within our movement.

You should strive to educate this person in a way that does not affect their pride or come off as "holier-than-thou." If possible, this should be done in private, so that the person doesn't feel humiliated by a public reprimand. Ideally, it should occur soon after the mistake, to increase its effectiveness.

RNC Court Watch Documentation

Defendant's Name: _____

Case Number: _____

Charge(s): _____

Civil Petty Misdemeanor Misdemeanor Gross Misdemeanor Felony

Arrest Location: _____

Courtroom Number/Location: _____

Judge: _____

Defense Lawyer: _____

Prosecutor: _____

Type of Hearing: _____

Notes (include any motions, pleas offered or accepted, any anything unusual):

Next Hearing Date/Time/Location/Judge: _____

Courtwatcher Name: _____

Today's Date: _____

Community RNC Arrestee Support Structure

Travel Fund Information

Are you coming into town to fight your charges? We support you!

About the Travel Fund

We have funds available for people who are traveling to the Twin Cities to fight their RNC-related charges in court.

Anyone who is in need is encouraged to apply.

Our travel fund is limited, so funds will be available on a first-come, first-served basis. We also encourage you to arrange for carpools or other combined travel arrangements to decrease the overall costs of travel.

Whenever possible, we will try to give priority to those who are facing severe charges or who may experience life-changing circumstances because they will need to travel for court appearances. We will also try to give priority to individuals who are volunteering their time and efforts to arrestee support in some capacity.

Please be as specific as possible with your request. The more specific you can be about how much money you will need, the easier it will be for us to make a funding decision. Please attach receipts, invoices, or estimates if you have them.

There is no application deadline. Decisions will be made weekly as applications come in. For this reason, we ask that you submit your request to allow time for at least 7-10 days before hearing from us. In emergency situations, we will try to make a decision and get back to you as soon as possible.

How to Apply

Submit all applications to mc08hospitality [at] riseup [dot] net. The application form is below. You can attach the form to the email or copy and paste the information into the email. For receipts and invoices, you can attach scanned images or transcribe all the relevant information into your application.

Community RNC Arrestee Support Structure

Travel Fund Application

Submit all applications to rnc08hospitality [at] riseup [dot] net.

Personal Information

Name:

Contact info (address, email address, phone number):

Court date:

Charges/severity:

Funding Details

How much money do you need?

By when do you need the money?

Please tell us how your court-related travel affects your life and why this funding is important to your ability to fight your charges.

If you have scanned images of your invoices or receipts, attach them to the email with your application. If you do not have scanned images or are estimating your funding needs, provide detailed information from your invoices/receipts or your best estimate here:

RNC Civil Litigation Intake Form

Privileged and Confidential - This form is privileged attorney-client work product produced in anticipation of litigation and for use by civil litigation counsel.

This form is for coordinating potential plaintiffs in civil suits against various state agencies that should be held accountable for their actions during the Republican National Convention. It will be used to facilitate communication between potential plaintiffs and to help coordinate small group and class action lawsuits. You should not include any potentially incriminating information on this form and should only discuss the particulars of your situation and suit with your lawyer in a secure location.

Plaintiff Personal Information

Name:	
Street address:	
City, State, Zip:	
Phone number(s):	
Email address:	
Date of birth:	

Civil Litigation Information

Are you interested in helping coordinate civil litigation?	Y N
Are you interested in a small group claim or class action suit?	Y N
Are you interested in being a lead plaintiff?	Y N
Did you suffer any physical harm during the RNC?	Y N
Did you suffer any emotional or psychological harm during the RNC?	Y N
Did you lose any property during the RNC?	Y N
Were you arrested during the RNC? If yes, provide information about the location and date of your arrest, including whether you were part of a mass arrest (but not any potentially incriminating information!):	Y N

NOTICE OF CLAIM

City of St. Paul

City Clerk

15 W. Kellogg Blvd.

310 City Hall, St. Paul, MN 55102

You may be contacted by telephone to discuss your claim. You may be asked to provide additional information or documents depending on your claim. Please attach copies of applicable documents to this form, for example, drawings or maps of where the incident occurred, medical bills, photographs, repair bills and receipts. Originals will not be returned.

1) Basic claimant information:

First Name _____ Middle Initial _____ Last Name _____

Street Address _____
Number _____ Street Name _____ Apartment/Lot # _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____ Cell Phone _____

Date of Incident _____ Time _____ AM / PM (circle one)

2) Describe the events that form the basis of your claim: _____

3) Where did the incident occur? _____

4) Why do you feel the City of St. Paul or its employees are responsible? _____

5) Were you injured? Y / N (circle one) If yes, what kind of injuries did you sustain? _____

6) Have you received treatment (mental or physical)? Y / N (circle one) If no, do you plan to seek treatment in the future? Y / N (circle one) If you have sought, or plan to seek, treatment, please describe that treatment: _____

7) Did you miss work as a result of the incident? Y / N (circle one) If yes, how many hours? _____

8) Please indicate the \$ amount you are seeking in compensation, and/or what you would like the City to do to resolve this claim: _____

By signing this form, you are stating that all the information you have provided here is true and correct to the best of your knowledge. UNSIGNED FORMS WILL NOT BE PROCESSED. Submitting a claim containing intentionally false information could lead to criminal prosecution.

Print the Name of the Person Making the Claim: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Are you attaching additional sheets to this form? Y / N (circle one) How many? _____

CHECK THESE OUT!

CRASS

<http://www.rncaftermath.org>

RNC '08 Report Archive

<http://rnc08report.org>

RNC 8 Defense Committee

<http://rnc8.org>

Texas 2 (Brad Crowder, David McKay)

<http://www.freethetexas2.org>

Matt DePalma

<http://www.abcf.net/abcf.asp?page=prisoners>

CONTACT US!

crasszine@riseup.net



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THE CRASS ZINE WORKING GROUP**

